"Ramayana in Cambodia".
Roveda 2009.

11 The Rama Epic in a Buddhist context

Although this book is focused on Cambodian Buddhist paintings, visual narratives of the Rama story inspired from the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*, are treated in some detail because the local rendition of this story, called the *Reamker*, was the source of mural paintings at several religious monuments in the late 19th and early 20th century. This is most likely due to the fact that the *Reamker* was given a strong Buddhist flavour in Cambodia in the 17th century when Rama, presented in his usual role as the incarnation of Vishnu Narayana, was also considered to be a Bodhisattva, a being promised Enlightenment and destined to become the Buddha.

The Rama Story in Cambodia

The influence of Indian literature on Cambodian art and culture is long-standing, starting in the Angkorean period in the 9th century, if not before, and has continued until today. The Rama Epic, in one version or another, has had more influence than any other story on the visual narratives used in Cambodian sacred monuments and temples.

The first Rama poem, the *Ramayana*, was written in Sanskrit by the Indian poet, Valmiki, and is generally considered the classic version of this Indian epic. Subsequently, the story evolved with insertions and abridgements, probably through the oral telling by bards in India and then elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, the original Indian epic, or its derivate, was localised and adapted into the *Reamker*, sometimes called the *Ramakerti*. The Rama Epic was used as the theme for bas-relief, sandstone narrative carvings in sacred temples from the Angkorean period. In addition, it has been the source for theatrical representations, dance and shadow puppet theatre from then until the present time.

In Cambodia, the 7th century stele of Veal Kantel (K. 359; Aymonier 1901, II: 180) mentions that the *Ramayana* had to be recited daily, without interruptions, as did the *Harivamsha* and the *Puranas*. Sanskrit literature, which was already popular with the Khmers since the early times, was probably appreciated both for its ethical and religious function. The Pre Rup stele also contains references to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

Following the Indian tradition, these epics were probably part of an elite education, as well as the dancing and chanting repertoire. In one inscription, King Suryavarman I is described as highly interested in listening to the recitations of the sacred Hindu books such as the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* (Majumdar 1953: 615; Sharan, 1974: 232). When the sister of Bhavavarman I was married to a Brahmin, she made gifts of the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Puranas* to a temple situated on the banks of the Mekong; it is said those sacred books were regularly read in the temple (Majumdar 1953: 18). Udayadityavarman II made great use of Vaishnava epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, in decorating the temple of Baphuon.

The popularity of the *Ramayana* in the visual narratives of Angkor can been attested to by sculpture from the 10th century with a group at Koh Ker (Prasat Chen) showing two monkeys fighting, probably the brothers, Sugrib and Bali, carved during the rule of Jayavarman IV (921-941). Then,

Opposite: Wat Damrei Sor. A stucco and cement high relief of a fight scene from the Rama Epic

A lintel on the western *gopura* III of Ta Prohm temple (end of the 12th century), showing Bali, the monkey king, and Dundubhi, the bull, entangled in battle

The base of pillars of the central sanctuary of Banteay Samre (12th century), showing Bali and Dundubhi fighting

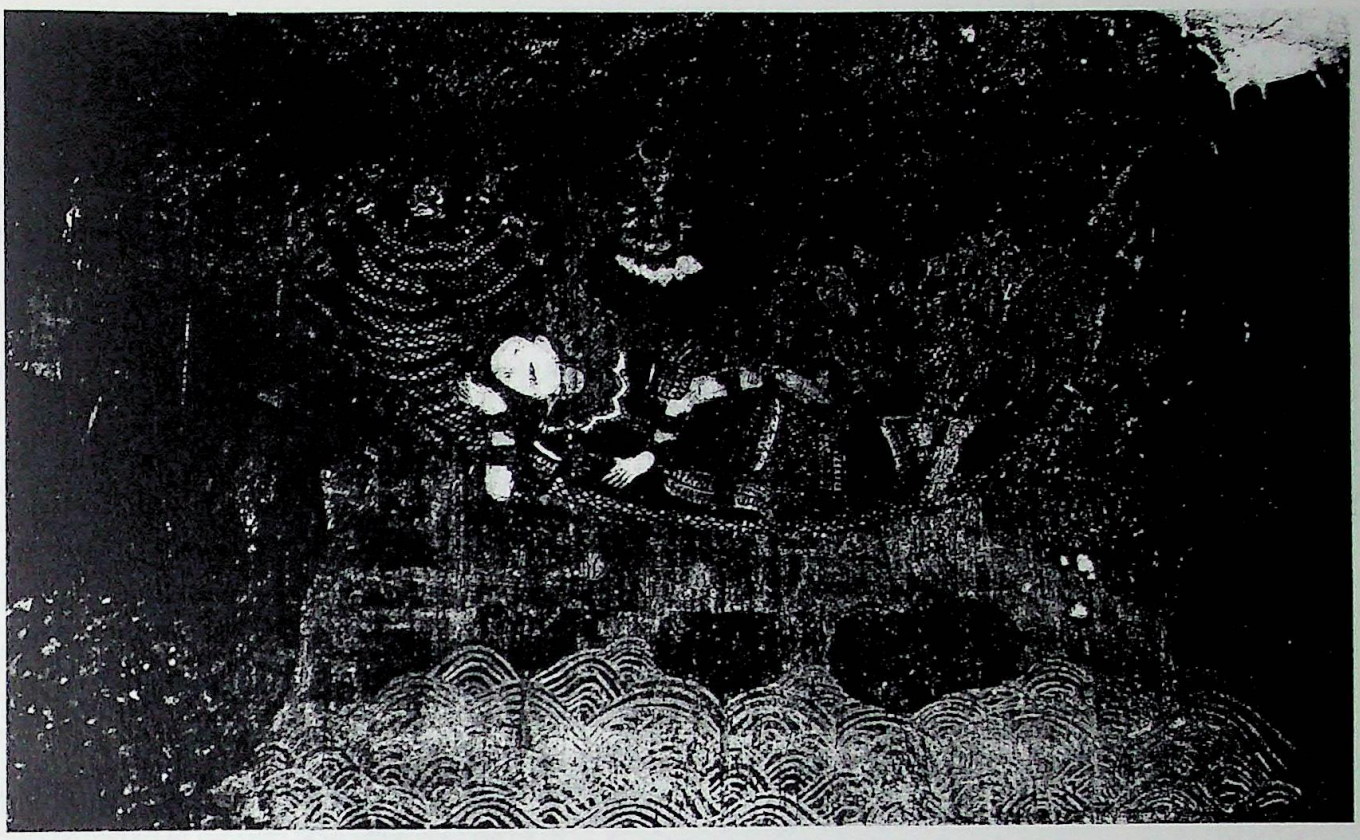
at Banteay Srei, also conventionally dated to the 10th century, there are several reliefs with Ramayanic themes. The continual and growing popularity of the Rama story is attested to by the abundance of reliefs at Baphuon, Phimai and Angkor Wat and in nearly all the temples built from the mid-10th to the end of the 12th century, in some form or another. An examination of the carvings indicates that all the scenes have elements that can be traced to the Valmiki rendition of the epic. However, this conclusion raises questions as to whether the Valmiki version was the only one used by Khmer artists. Given the widespread dispersal of variations on the epic found in other regions of India and Southeast Asia, it seems probable that other renditions were utilised, although from when and where is still unknown.

In Cambodia, there are no stone carvings from the 17th or 18th century. Nor have any Post-Angkorean mural paintings prior to the late 19th century been uncovered to date. The systematic research of M. Giteau revealed the presence of 14 panels carved on wooden planks, originally at Babaur[35] (Giteau 1975:209). Although incomplete, they were carved with the themes from the *Reamker*, the *Jatakas* and perhaps scenes from the Life of the Buddha. These planks were deposited in the National Museum of Phnom Penh and photographs can be seen in Giteau's important publication of 1975, including a scene of monkeys and Lakshmana as prisoners of Indrajit's arrow that transformed into *nagas* and a generic scene with monkeys (Giteau 1975; Figs. 69-75).[36]

Divergence from Valmiki's rendition has been noticed by many scholars in the relief of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk at Angkor Wat. The personage holding the tail of the serpent Vasuki, on the side of the *devatas*, is not a *deva* but a monkey, which is neither represented in the *Balakanda*, Book I of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, nor in the *Mahabharata* where the same story is also narrated. However, a monkey's participation is mentioned in the Kamban rendition of the *Ramayana* (Sundaram 2002:167). In the chapter, *Kishkinda Kandam*, it is said that Bali obtained boundless strength from Shiva. When the gods and demons were churning the ocean, the valiant Bali appeared on the scene, completing the churning by holding Vasuki, which explains why Bali ascended to heaven at his death. This strongly implies that the *Kamba Ramayana* was known in Cambodia in the mid-12th century, during the period when Angkor Wat was being built. Written in vernacular language, the Kamban version, while openly acknowledging Valmiki as the inspirational model, was compiled through time as an independent work drawing upon myths from different sources and completed in Tamil in South India around the 12th century.

35 The location of the *vihara*, in or around Kompong Chhnang of Bobour or Bobur, so often mentioned in French texts, has not, to date, been identified by us.

36 We have to thank Bertrand Porte for having shown us two of the panels deposited in the restoration department of the National Museum of Phnom Penh.



Wat Bo. A scene from the Rama Epic in the *vihara*, showing Vishnu on Ananta Naga creating a pink lotus on which sits the boy, Anomatan, first ruler of Ayodhya and ancestor of Rama.

Rama Epic textual representations on Cambodian murals

Although there are only two major painted narratives of the Rama story in Khmer art, the murals of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda in Phnom Penh and those in the *vihara* of Wat Bo in Siem Reap, it is helpful to examine the textual history of the Rama Epic in Cambodia in order to determine which version was adopted by the various artists and to which narrative they refer, with the hope of clarifying their role in the art works at various points in time. In our opinion, one of the most distinguishing elements can be found in the different events narrated at the beginning of the various versions, labelled herein as the 'preamble', which are analyzed below. In addition to differences in the 'preamble', there are many other episodes, small and large, that are narrated in some versions and excluded from others.

The benchmark of the Rama story is the Valmiki *Ramayana*, of which the translation by Shastri is being used here (Shastri 1992). Valmiki starts with Brahma encouraging him to write Rama's epic in metric form. The action proper begins when King Dasaratha of Ayodhya performs a sacrifice to obtain a son. His prayers are answered by the gods and his three wives bear four sons: Rama, Bharata and the twins Lakshmana and Satrughna, who are all partial incarnations of Vishnu, although, Vishnu manifests himself more in Rama than in the others. The boys grow up, are educated in the arts, sciences and archery; Rama goes on and bends the Great Bow of Shiva, wins his bride, Sita, and they are married. After this comes the confrontation with Parasurama, concluding the *Balakanda*. For the purpose of this discussion and the comparisons between the various textual and visual narratives, we stop with the Kakanasur and the Parasurama episodes, which are similar in many renditions of the Rama Epic.

37 In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Parasurama is a powerful Brahmin who has avenged the death of his father by killing thousands of Kshatriya, members of the ruling class. He challenges Rama to a trial of strength, knowing Rama has just bent the bow of Shiva in the contest for Sita, a challenge that Rama easily meets and Parasurama is vanquished. Parasurama is comparable to one of the incarnations of Vishnu as 'the man with an axe', who incarnated for the purpose of repressing the tyranny of the Kshatriya. In later renditions of the Rama epic, Parasurama becomes Ramaparamasur, in the Cambodian *Reamker* and Rammasun, in the Thai *Ramakien*, a god who wields an axe making thunder.

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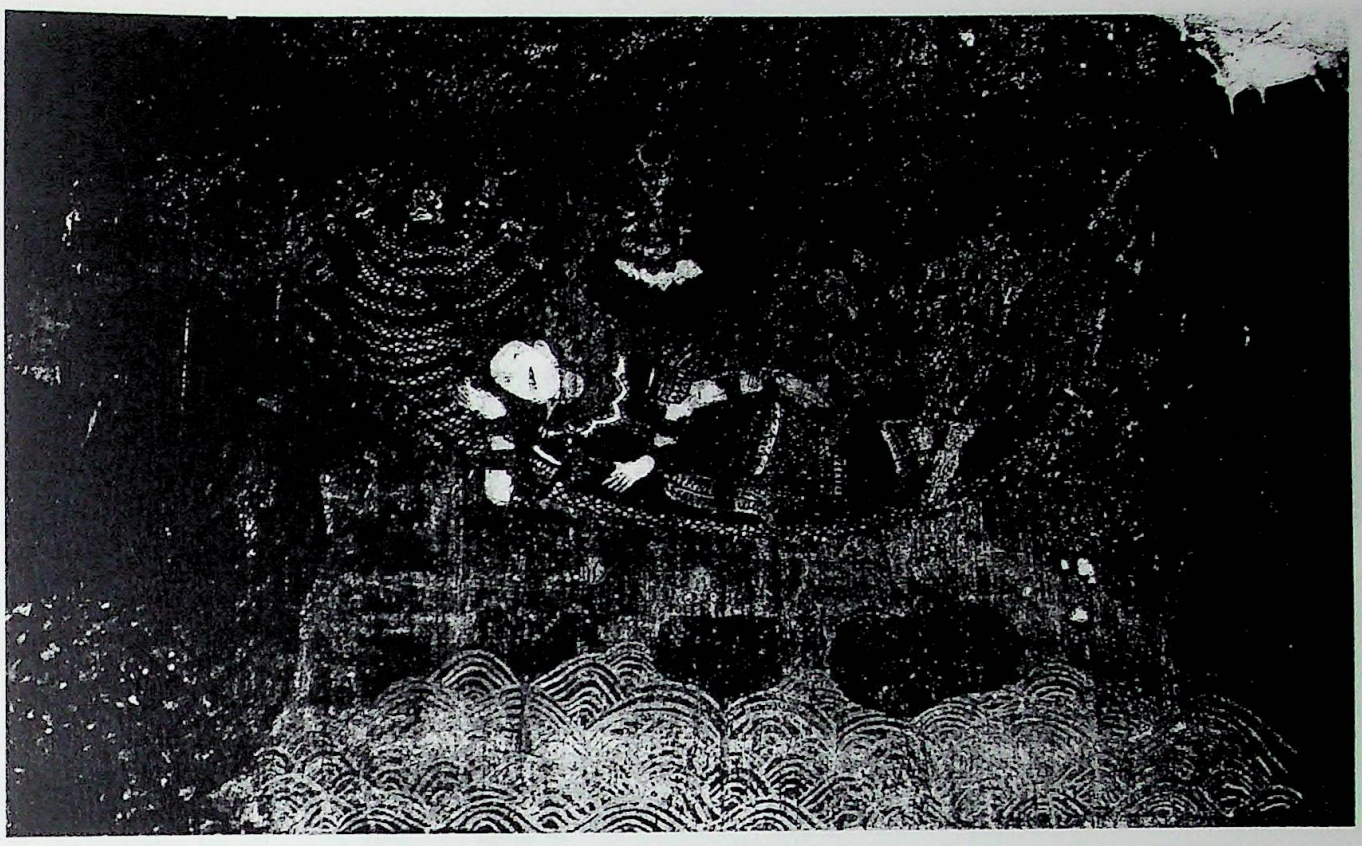

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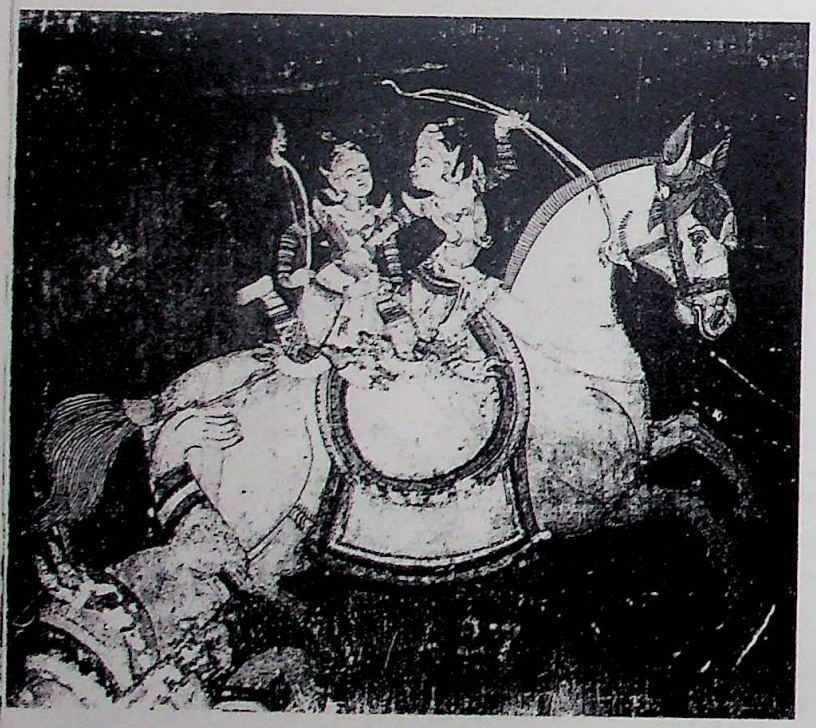
Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, Phnom Penh. The scene of the Kakanasur, when the black crows attack the hermits to disrupt their ceremonies.



Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, Phnom Penh. The two sons of Rama and Sita, Kusa and Lava, riding the forbidden white horse.

One of the oldest texts of Cambodian literature is the *Lpoek Angkor Vat*, which translates as '*The Poem of Angkor Wat*' (herein labeled the 'LAV'). Together with the early versions of the *Reamker* or *Reamker I* (Pou, Études 1977: 39), they represent the only surviving epic literature of the Cambodian Middle Age (15th-18th century). The importance of the LAV is that the second part of the poem describes scenes of the Rama Epic (Pou, Études 1977: 40).

The first part of the poem tells how the god Indra, having recognized the superior beauty and super-human powers of the boy-prince Prea Ket Mealea, abducts him to his celestial palace. However, the angels and other divine beings cannot stand the human smell of the boy and Indra decides to send him back to earth. To compensate for his loss of celestial joys and delights, Indra gives orders to Visvacarma, the architect of the Universe, to build a marvellous palace on earth for the young prince and decorate it with lions and '*painted* panels' (emphasis added), illustrating a multitude of events of the stories that follow (Pou Études 1977: 155). The second part of the narrative, according to the abridged version of Pou, starts with a description of the fortress of Ayodhya and King Dasaratha's palace, and continues with the gods venerating Isur (Shiva) with Naray (Vishnu), who has previously fought all of Isur's enemies, deciding to incarnate as Ramadeb (Rama) (Pou Études 1977: 155). The narrative continues with the King of Mithila organizing a competition to lift the ancestral bow to which all the gods attend. Ramadeb lifts the bow, wins the hand of Sita and marries her. On his way back to Ayudhya (Ayodhya), his father's city, Ramadeb meets and defeats Ramaparamasur (Parasurama).

In 1977, Pou distinguished an ancient version of the *Reamker I* of the Cambodian Middle Age, from the *Reamker II* written later in the mid-18th century, asserting that *Reamker II* is a continuation of *Reamker I*. The *Reamker I* was composed by anonymous poets of great talent during a period of flourishing Buddhism in Cambodia. They took Valmiki's epic, sorted out the episodes and characters, re-examined them in the Buddhist context, trimming drastically what was immaterial to their spiritual views, and shaped a new abridged epic, coloured with Buddhism, but lacking the glamour and elegance that came with the elaborate descriptions of royal ceremonies and court intrigues (Pou 1986:243).

In the *Reamker*, both the text translated by Pou as *Ramakerti I* (Pou Études 1977), and that by Judith Jacob (Jacob 1986), the narrative begins with the episode of Kakanasur wherein Ram (Rama) and Laks (Lakshmana) are already adults at this point. This episode is followed by that when the King of Mithila adopts Neang Seda (Sita) after a

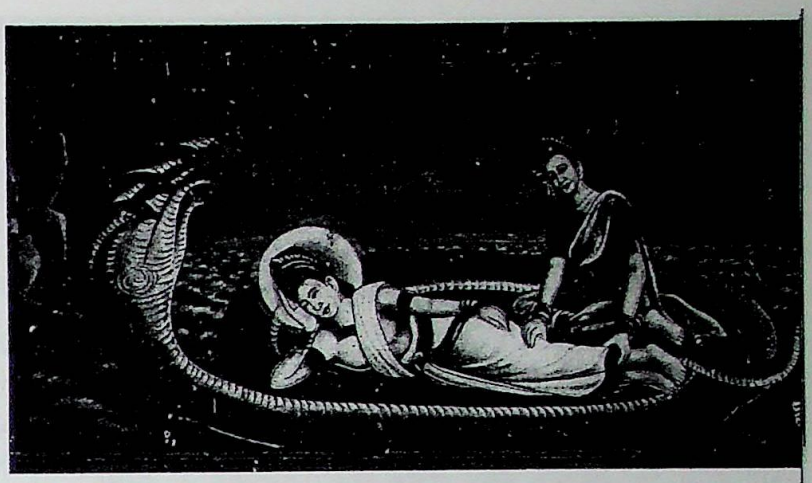
royal ploughing ceremony, then the episodes of the victory of Ram (Rama) in the bow contest, the wedding with Neang Seda, the departure for Ayudhya, and the encounter and the fight with Ramapamasu (Parasurama).

In addition to editions of the *Reamker* noted above, there are other Cambodian versions of the Rama Epic:

a) A version of the *Okña* Vien Thiounn[39] of 1903 (herein labeled as 'OVT'), although it is not clear if this text is an explanation of the mural paintings of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda at Phnom Penh (Népote and Gamonet 2000: 56), or a story inspired by those images (Ly Daravuth and Muan, *Reamker* 2001). After being lost among many manuscripts, it was found, edited and illustrated by Darawuth and Muan in 2001. The narrative starts at the court of King Tusarot (Dasaratha) with the birth of Ram (Rama) and his brothers, followed by a chapter on Krong Reap (Ravana) and his family including the birth of his daughter Seda (Sita). Chapter 6 narrates the Kakanaso (Kakanasur) episode. The competition to raise the ancestral bow follows, with the victorious Ram receiving the prize, Princess Seda. On the way to Ayudhya after their wedding, they meet Ream Boron Eyso (Parasurama) who is subdued by Ram.

b) The murals of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda of Phnom Penh have legends written under the paintings, which were translated and assembled by Suzanne Karpelès in 1925 (Karpelès 1937: 32), showing yet again another version of the story (herein labeled as RIB, the *Reamker of the Institut Bouddhique*). In the RIB, the story starts, without any 'preamble', at the court of Ayudhya, with Ram and Lak leaving their parents to go to study with the hermits and learn martial arts; the birth of Seda; the interruption by Kakanasur of a ritual with Ram killing them and their descendants; then King Kaikeya requesting Bharata and Satrughna to help him rule his kingdom, after which follows the contest to lift the ancestral bow, won by Ram who marries Seda. On the way to Ayudhya the confrontation with Reamishvara (Parasurama) takes place.

c) Finally, there is a version of the *Reamker*, called by Bizot, *The Symbolic Love of Rama and Sita*, based on the verbal narration by the Khmer bard, Mi Chak, (herein labeled as 'RMC'), tape-recorded in 1969 (Bizot 1989). The story starts with a short 'preamble' in which the gods create the world followed by the legend of Nonthok being reborn as Reab (Ravana), of Achana and Svahay and the origin of Bali (Vali), Sugrib (Sugriva) and Hanuman. Then follows the love affairs of Reab with elephants and fish; his temporary transformation into a gecko to enter Indra's harem; and the resulting birth of a baby girl, Seda, whom Reab orders to be thrown into the water. Seda is later found by the hermit king of Mithila, Janaka, who adopts her as his



Wat Nokor. Vishnu on Ananta Naga, with Lakshmi at his feet.

Wat Nokor. Rama breaking the ancestral bow in the contest to marry Sita.

39 *Okña* is a title of a person appointed by the king.

Wat Nokor. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana meeting Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana.

daughter and proclaims that he who can lift the ancestral bow will marry her. Surprisingly, at this point there is no mention of the competition, the marriage event, nor the encounter with Parasurama. Then the gods Indra and Naray (Vishnu) decide to produce four Bodhisattvas that will become Ram and his brothers. The episode of Dasarath's (Dasaratha) fight with Adity and the damage to his chariot wheel, repaired by his wife, is interpolated here. The education of the four princes by the *rishis* follows as usual, with 500 demons transformed into crows (*kakanasuras*) attacking the reunion of the *rishis* but being exterminated by the four brothers. King Dasaratha abdicates in favour of Bhirut (Bharata) and Sumutrut (Satrughna) (in contrast to what is said in RIB), while Rama leaves his parents together with Seda and Laks, who insist on following him. In this case, it is possible that the RMC was based on the visual narrative Mi Chak may have seen on the reliefs of Angkor Wat and the murals of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda.

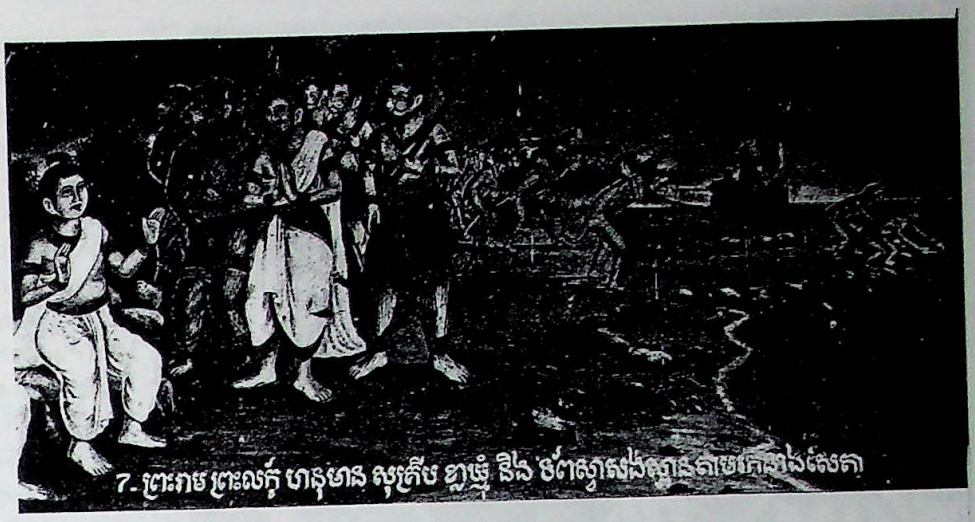
Yet another separate position is occupied by the *Trai Bhet*. In the version analyzed by de Bernon, after the chapters on cosmogony and cosmology there is a chapter which includes the genealogy of the personages of the Rama Epic (de Bernon 1994: 80). Interestingly, this chapter bears a remarkable thematic resemblance to the 'preamble' of the Thai *Ramakien* as described below. Chapter four starts the story of Rama proper, with the events of his youth, the fight with Kakanasur, and ends with his victory over Ravana and the triumphal return to Ayodhya.

The Thai rendition of the Rama story, the *Ramakien*,[40] the most complete version of which was compiled and completed under the direction of King Rama I in 1798, likely had some presence and following in Cambodia at various times. The narrative starts with a 'preamble' consisting of numerous episodes describing events before the birth of Phra Ram (Rama). The first episode narrates the fight between Phra Narai (Vishnu) and Hiran[41], a demon who drags the earth to the depths of the ocean and is subsequently killed by Phra Narai in his white boar incarnation. Phra Narai then changes back to his original form and, while reclining on his *naga* throne, Ananta Naga, a lotus bud rises from his stomach upon which sits a handsome boy, Anomatan. Phra Narai offers Anomatan to Phra Isuan (Shiva), who creates a city, Ayudhya, making him its first king and, establishing a royal dynasty that will culminate in Phra Ram. The narrative continues with the foundation of Langka, the city of the demons, at the direction of Phra Phrom (Brahma). Following this, the 'preamble' of the *Ramakien* introduces several episodes to complete the genealogy of Phra Ram as well as the origin of the other principal characters: the demons Thotsakan (Ravana), his brother, Phiphek (Vibhishana), sister Samanakha (Surpanakha) and son, Inthorachit (Indrajit), and the monkey soldiers, Hanuman, Phali (Vali) and Sukhrip (Sugriva); and the straightening of Mount Krailat, the abode of Phra Isuan, by Phali and Sukhrip and Mount Sumeru by Thotsakan. In addition, there

40 The only full length English language version of the *Ramakien* was created by Ray Olsson (Olsson 1968). Since it was translated into English from a German translation, it naturally has many limitations, and accordingly, has been used in this analysis only for the general outline and sequence of the episodes.

41 Hiran was probably based on Hiran-yaksha of Indian mythology and the twin brother of Hiranyakasipu, slain by Vishnu when he incarnates as *Nara-simha*, a man-lion.

are various legends such as that of Nonthok and his diamond finger and the battle of Mani Mekhala with her orb of light and Rammasun (Parasurama) with his axe, the origin of lightening and thunder, respectively. Up to this point, we can consider this the end of the 'preamble' to the *Ramakien*, with the story proper starting with the incarnation of Phra Narai being born as Phra Ram, his brothers incarnating from Phra Narai's attributes and Phra Narai's consort, Phra Lakshmi incarnated as Thotsakan's daughter, Nang Sida (Sita). This is followed by Nang Sida's repudiation by Thotsakan and her discovery by King Chanok (Janaka), the fight with Ka Kanasun (Tataka), the Great Bow Contest and Phra Ram and Nang Sida's marriage before the confrontation with Rammasun (Parasurama).



Wat Nokor. Rama watches the building of the causeway to Lanka.

Conclusions on the versions of the Rama Epic

From the epigraphic evidence, it is known that the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, or some other Indian recension, was popular among the Khmer elite. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the people at large also enjoyed a version in the Khmer language, narrated and elaborated by bards, possibly accompanied by a small orchestra with dancers.[42] This was at some point represented as the shadow leather puppet theatre and may have happened already at the time of the building of Angkor Wat. Only during periods of political and social stability, during which there were no civil wars, insurrections, or wars, and when the storytellers had acquired independent positions from the ruling class along with writing skills, could the tale of Rama have been recorded in the form of *Reamker* on perishable material, not an easy task considering its length and complexity. When this occurred is still unclear, as no manuscript older that the 17th century has survived.

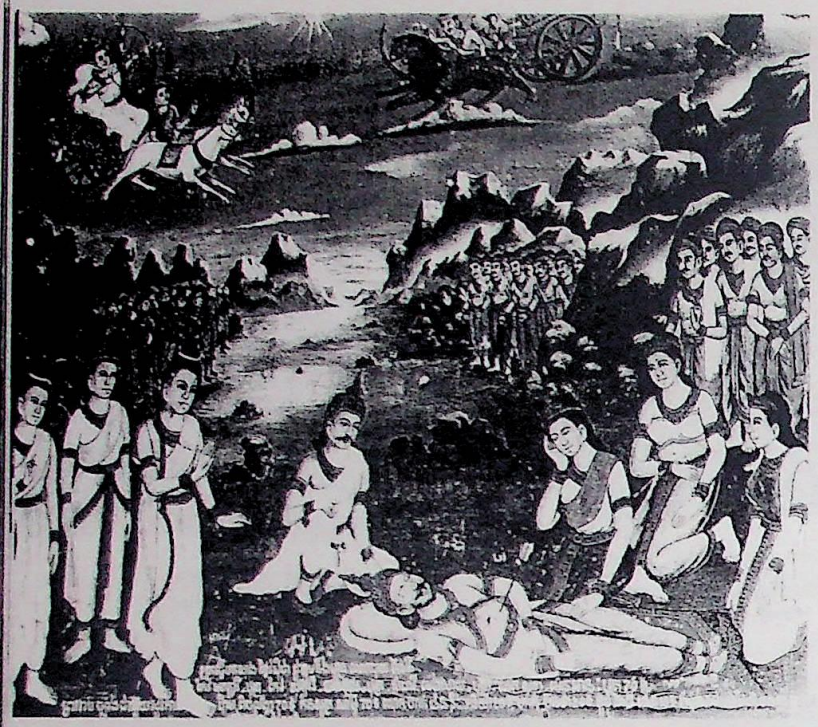
From the above, we are tempted to generalise that there have been as many versions of the Rama story as there have been storytellers, each adding their own flavour, perhaps further enhanced by the scribe who wrote down the verbal narrative. However, it appears evident that two main families of the Rama Epic have existed in Cambodia, with texts of the same basic plot, but with a large number of interpolations, that is:

a) Those starting directly with the birth of Rama and his brothers, their youth and/or with the episode of the *kakanasur*. These texts are the classic *Reamker* translated by Pou and Jacob, the OVT and RIB.

b) Those starting with a 'preamble'. This category covers the *Trai Bhet*, the LAV and perhaps episodes performed in dance and the shadow puppet theatre, along with the RMC version, although, it is not clear how much of Mi Chak's tale was inspired by the visual narratives to which he had been exposed consciously or subconsciously. Included in this group is the Thai *Ramakien*.

So far no visual narratives of the Rama Epic are known from the period between the end of the Angkorean era and the writing of the LAV. However, it is reasonable to assume that the Rama story continued to be narrated by itinerant storytellers. Therefore, the link between the

42 The *Lkhon khol* is a dance drama performing only a restricted repertoire of the *Reamker* exclusively by men.



Wat Nokor The death of Krong Reap (Ravana).

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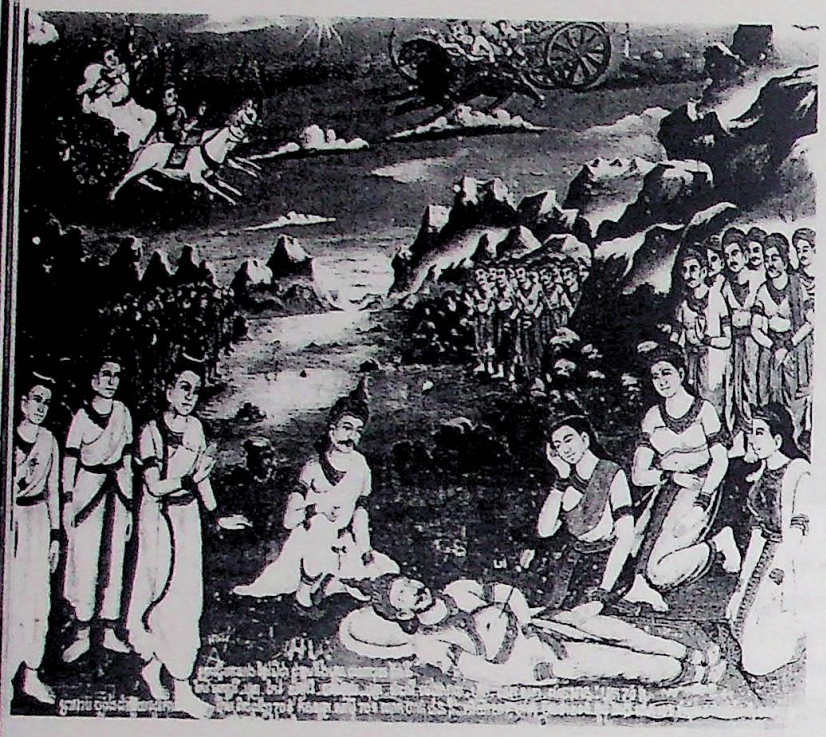

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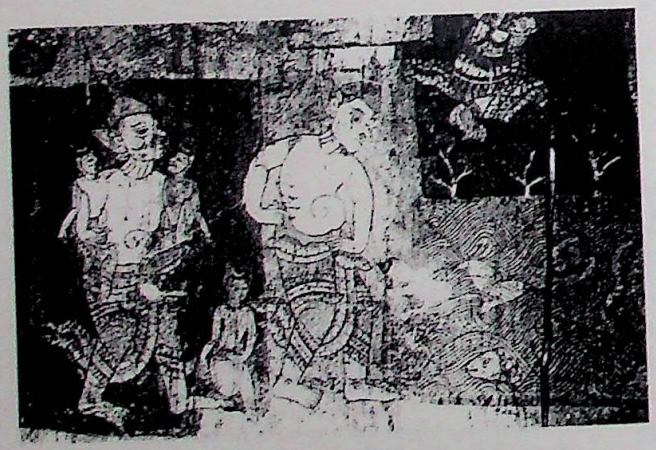
Wat Bo: Indra leading Anomatan to the newly created city of Ayudhya from the Rama Epic.

Wat Bo: A scene from the Rama Epic depicting Shiva attempting to kill the *yaksa*, Triburam.



Wat Bo: A scene from the Rama Epic showing the hermit Kodom carrying his two children, with the third walking, then throwing them into the river, whereupon two of them are transformed into monkeys, Bali and Sugrib.

The Murals of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, Phnom Penh[47]

The mural paintings on the walls of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda at the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh were executed at the end of the 19th century by order of King Norodom, possibly to demonstrate the power of his fragile Norodom dynasty over that of his brother, Sisowath. This was perhaps a symbolical attempt to re-appropriate the Rama legend to assert legitimacy. It was the spiritual will of the old King Norodom, through the mediation of the head of the monks, Samdech Teang, who chose the best artist available at the time, the *Okña* Tep Nimit Mak (Népote and Gamonet 2000:14). The murals were probably initiated soon after 1895 and completed by 1904. It is now accepted that the painted narrative of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda murals was the source of the elusive written version of the OVT, which was started upon completion of the murals when the *Okña* Vien Thiounn was a royal minister (Ly Daravuth and Muan *Reamker* 2001).

According to Népote and Gamonet, at the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, the visual narrative starts on the southeast side with that of the *Reamker I*, but stops after some 12 metres with the Battle of Lanka (Népote and Gamonet 2000: 22). The *Reamker II* starts from the northwest side with Sita's ordeal by fire and ends with Rama attempting to call Sita back and her refusal to condescend. The paintings, separated into scenes, are numbered from 1 to 166, compared with the inventory of Karpelès, who counted 600 inscriptions.

The best and only surviving complete documentation of the murals is that of the photographs taken in 1957 by the EFEO photographer R. Maury, published by Bizot in 1997, albeit in black and white (Bizot 1989). In addition, twenty-six photographs of random topics were published in colour by the Nafilyans in l997 (Nafilyans 1997).

Murals of the Vihara of Wat Bo in Siem Reap

As previously mentioned, the other complete visual narrative cycle of the Rama tale can be found in the *vihara* at the Buddhist monastery of Wat Bo in Siem Reap. According to Giteau the paintings on this *vihara* were executed between 1920 and 1924 by two designers of leather skins for the shadow puppet theatre, Ta Peul, who was about 40 years old, and his nephew Kong Dith (Giteau 1999). Given their background, they introduced elements of the shadow puppet theatre, as shown by the similarity with the figures of the *Nang Sbek*, even in the conception of movement by reversing the leather skin to indicate a return or a change in time. Almost all the 111 scenes depicted at Wat Bo are underlined by short inscriptions in Khmer, many of which are now unfortunately unreadable. Most of the inscriptions are rather imaginative as they do not necessarily correspond to what is depicted in the corresponding mural.

A different dating, however, has been put forth by Népote & Gamonet (Népote & Gamonet 2002: 19). They reported that makers of shadow puppets figures had previously heard of a team of painters active at Wat Bo from 1887-1890. This date is supported also by the fact that another maker

47 For an exhaustive study of the history of the narrative cycle of the *Reamker* painting at the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, see Népote and Gamonet, "Le Ramayana au Palais de Phnom Penh: Une Vision du Politique et de la Royauté au Début du XXe s," (Népote and Gamonet 2000: 5—105).

of leather puppets, Duk Roeun, learned drawing from painters active at Wat Bo monastery in 1890, namely Peul, Touch and his son, and that the murals were painted at the end of the 19th century.

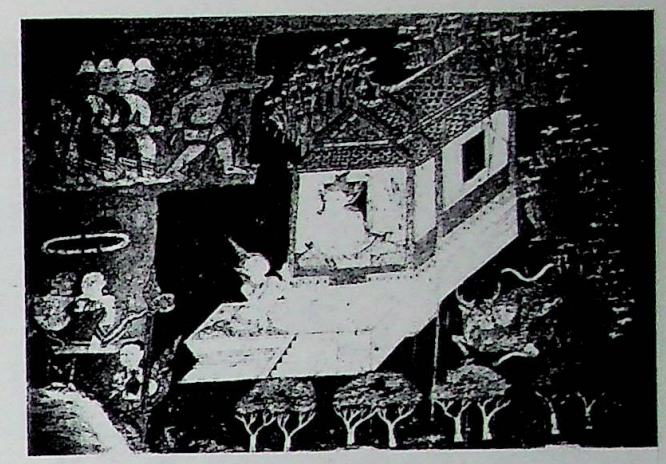
The mural paintings of Wat Bo in Siem Reap present an interesting case indicating the possible existence of another rendition of the Rama story in Cambodia. Giteau has proposed that "another version of the Thai *Ramakien*", may have existed in Cambodia in the early 20th century, which was used for these mural paintings rather than the *Reamker* (Giteau 1999: 183). Alternatively, it is possible the mural paintings were derived from a version of the *Trai Bhet* (de Bernon 1994: 80), or were inspired directly by the Thai *Ramakien*, which is made plausible by the fact that Siem Reap was under Siamese political and cultural control until 1907. In this regard, it does not appear that there were any other paintings of this version of Rama's epic that could have been the source of the paintings of Wat Bo, including those of the almost contemporaneous Gallery of the Silver Pagoda of Phnom Penh. The *Trai Bhet* mentions many of the scenes depicted on the first 30 panels on the western wall of Wat Bo, none of which are seen in the *Reamker*. As well, essentially all of the scenes neatly correspond to those of the 'preamble' of the Thai *Ramakien*, many of which are also illustrated on the murals along the Gallery of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaeo) in Bangkok. These panels in Wat Bo illustrate the genealogy of Rama and Ravana, along with Ravana's early victories and defeats, as well as the origin of the principal characters, Hanuman, Bali and Sugrib; the fights of the gods against evil *asuras*; the legends of the King of the *Nagas* and of Nonthok; and the birth of Ravana, along with his early victories and defeats and his straightening of Mount Sumeru, which, interestingly, Giteau claims is a short symbolic representation of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk (Giteau 1999: 190).

In addition to Wat Bo, the latest addition to the repertoire of Rama visual narratives in the Siem Reap area are the brightly painted stucco on cement reliefs that decorate the newly built *vihara* of Wat Bo Kraum, completed in 2007. Furthermore, large painted panels with themes from the Rama Epic decorate the outer walls of the *vihara* of Angkor Wat North Monastery.

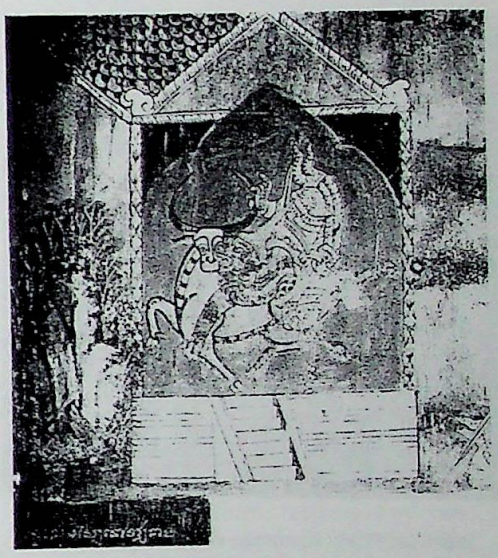
Depictions of the Rama Epic in the Battambong area

Several *viharas* in Battambong and the neighboring area have murals depicting scenes of the Rama Epic, although, again none older than the 20th century. This includes, the stucco/cement reliefs of Wat Kdol depicting *Reamker* or *Ramakien* scenes, as well as the murals in niches over the windows of Wat Ksach Puoy. The most pictorial are the stucco reliefs of Wat Damrei Sor, mainly showing battle scenes between the monkeys and the demons of Ravana's army.

From the visual narratives, often quite scattered, it is not always possible to identify with certainty from which text they were inspired, whether Valmiki's *Ramayana*, a Cambodian *Reamker* version, or Thai *Ramakien*. However, in light of the fact that Battambong province was under the control of Siam for long periods, a study of Rama Epic visual narratives in the Battambong area could reveal the degree to which regional Buddhist art was subject to Siamese influence.



Wat Bo. A mural showing the daughter of King Romaphat going to seduce Kalaikot, a *rishi* with a deer head from the Rama Epic.



Wat Bo. A scene from the Rama Epic of Bali fighting the buffalo, Dundubhi, here shown in a building rather than a cave.

Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, Phnom Penh. Bali fighting the ferocious buffalo Dundubhi in a cave.

Wat Ksach Puoy. A fight between a monkey and an *asura*.

Wat Ksach Puoy. Hanuman embracing Suphana-matcha, the mermaid daughter of Ravana.

National Museum paintings

A striking example of the *Reamker* in Cambodian pictorial arts is a series of paintings in the National Museum of Phnom Penh that were included in an exhibition in Bonn, Germany in 2007 entitled the 'Gods of Cambodia'. In the exhibition catalogue, Dr. Hab Touch explained the events and narrative sequence (Ly Boreth 2007). The paintings were executed between 1903 and 1904 by forty artists under the direction of the court architect, the *Okña* Tep Nimit Mak, which explains the similarity in style with the wall paintings of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda. Painted in tempera on silk, they became part of the national collection in 1929, with some framed and hanging in the Museum gallery.

It is possible that the unknown court artists who painted these six paintings were inspired by the pictorial style of the mural painters at Wat Preah Keo Morokot, once at the centre of the Silver Pagoda cloister of Phnom Penh. Furthermore, it is likely that originally there was a complete set of paintings narrating the entire story of the *Reamker*, in a manner comparable to the narrative cycle found at the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda, and that the 'missing' episodes are now lost.

The Buddhization of the Rama Epic in Cambodia *Ramayana*

The Buddhist character of the *Reamker* is undeniable; the Buddhist imprint resides in the use of expressions characteristic of Buddhism as well as the inclusion of cosmological and philosophical aspects of Buddhism. The main traits of the Buddhization of the Rama Epic were amply explained by Pou, and are summarized below (Pou Études 1977).

Nomenclature

Rama is presented as the incarnation of Vishnu Narayana but is also named *Bodhisambhara*, a Buddhist term indicating the preliminary elements and the conditions necessary for a person aspiring to reach enlightenment, synonymous with a Bodhisattva. This seems to highlight a similarity between the *Reamker* and the *Jataka* narratives, especially that of the *Vessantara Jataka*, where the main protagonist is a prince-Bodhisattva exiled by his father king, who retreated with his family to the forest, taking on the life of a hermit.

The writers of the *Reamker* use the terms *bodhisattv* or *buddhanur* and *tathagat* (stanza 1796) when referring to Rama; then, in the syncretic context typical of the Khmers, Rama is referred to as 'he who, like Narai (Vishnu), has come to earth to rule and eliminate all demons' (stanza 2569); the list continues with explicit epithets such as 'omniscient, Buddha's illustrious treasure'. In addition, Pou lists many nouns and adjectives used with reference to Rama that are technically Buddhist and Rama can produce miracles in a manner comparable with the Buddha.

Sita, which means, 'furrow' in the Valmiki version of the *Ramayana*, becomes Seda, symbolizing 'white or pure', a Buddhist jewel quality. The guardian of Sita, when she is in captivity, is Trijata in the *Ramayana*, which becomes Sujata in the *Reamker*; and Parasurama, who has been transformed in *Reamker* to a demon, is given the demoniac suffix '*asur*' to become Paramasur.

Cosmological aspect

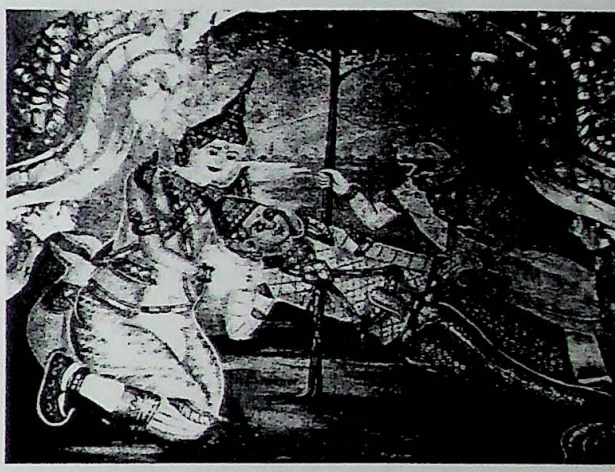
The *Reamker* is an epic microcosm based on Pali sacred texts, where the Universe is conceived in planes of existence inhabited by different beings;

Lower Wat Phnom Krom. Hanuman embracing Suphanamatcha, the mermaid daughter of Ravana, cleverly painted as if seen underwater.

the tale happens in the realm of the humans, between the realms of the gods and the lower realms of the hells. The remote island of Langka is the domain of the demons; in the forests, Rama and Lakshmana live in harmony with the wild animals and hermits (*rishis* or *muni*) devoted to meditation and silence. The centre of the cosmos, as in Hindu mythology, is Mount Sumeru surrounded by mountains separated by seas. The Heaven of the 33 gods is in the sky, where ancient Brahmanical deities reside. Shiva has his own territory where the unusual *kinnari* reside and the legendary bull Dundubhi lives. Despite the overall Brahmanical cosmological structure, the heavens are inhabited following Buddhist concepts.

Buddhist philosophy

As highlighted by Pou, the *Reamker* is not simply another version of the *Ramayana* epic tale; it is an entirely revised version written by poets with deep Buddhist beliefs (Pou Études 1977: 89). In it, the conception of the world and of life are typically Buddhist, including the ideas of impermanence; the wheel of existence; and the *samsaric* reincarnation cycle in the accomplishment of one's own *karma* and retribution of deeds.

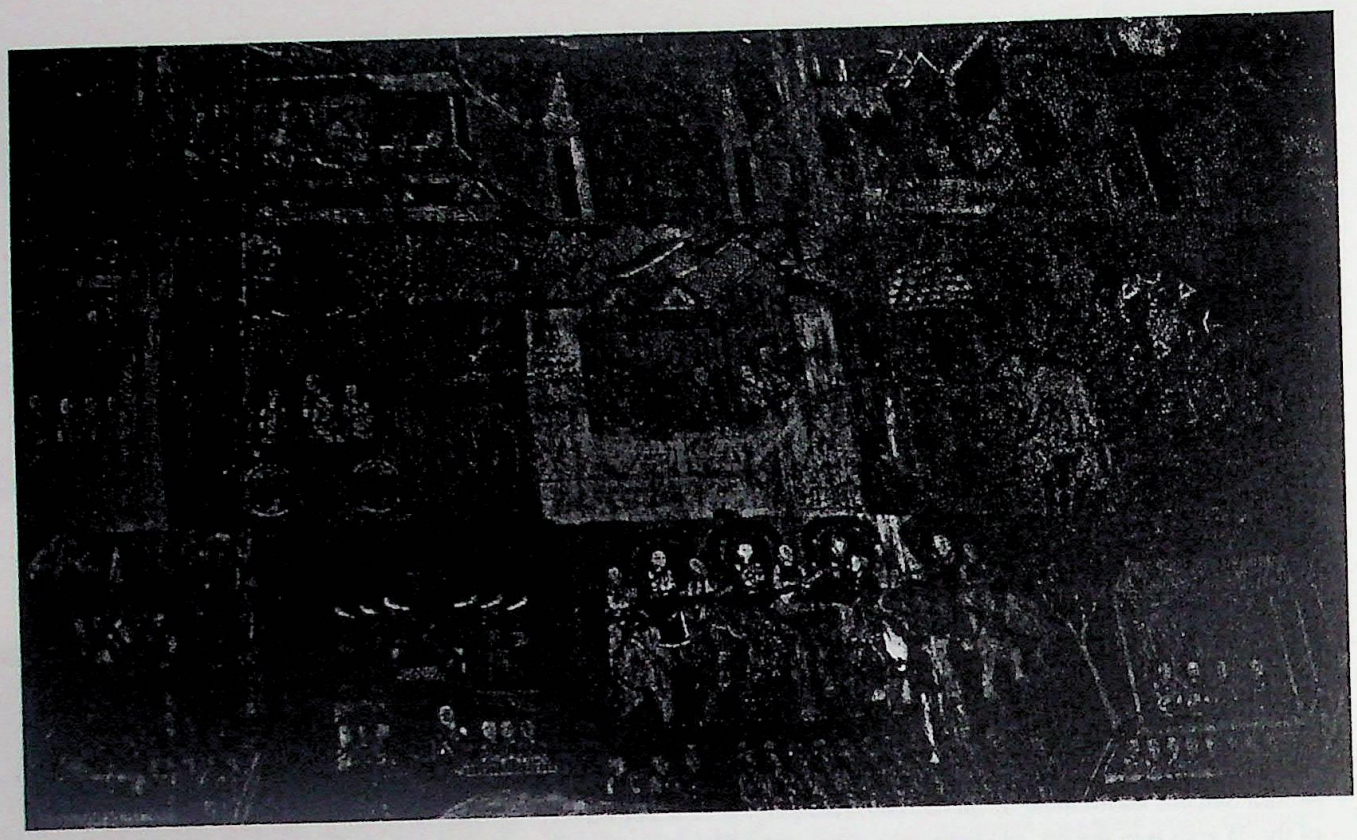


Upper Wat Phnom Krom. Lakshmana wounded by a magic weapon of Indrajit that magically transformed into a tree.

Buddhist iconography and the Rama Epic

Considering the strong Buddhist threads embedded in the *Reamker*, it is surprising that mural paintings narrating this epic are rarely combined in Buddhist *viharas* of Cambodia with murals depicting the Life of the Buddha and the *Jataka* tales. Having examined murals in about 150 Cambodian monasteries, as well as having researched old published records, we can say that paintings of the Rama Epic are generally confined to specific sites, contrary to what has been written by Ly Boreth (Ly Boreth, 2007:244). It can even be said that there has been a sort of idiosyncrasy for this type of combination and, when it occurs, Rama's epic events are depicted well separated and in a different location from those which are Buddhist *sensus strictus*, such as on the outer walls at Angkor Wat North Monastery, the stucco decoration on the enclosure wall of Wat Kdol, and the outer panels of Wat Damrei Sor. Even the *Reamker* paintings on the niches over the windows of Wat Ksach Puoy in Battambong are of a different date than the Buddhist themed murals on the walls of the *vihara*.

Upper Wat Phnom Krom. Hanuman carrying a piece of the Hemabant Mountain that has the medicinal plants needed to cure Lakshmana.



Wat Bo. Various panels on the walls of the *vihara* illustrating the adventures of Ravana from the Rama Epic.

Royal Symbolism and Rama

The association of former King Norodom Sihanouk with Buddhism can clearly be seen on murals inside several *viharas* depicting crucial events of the Life of the Buddha: Siddhartha's wedding, the Cremation and the Distribution of the Ashes. In the latter, Sihanouk is perceived as taking part in the righteous distribution of relics for the well-being of his people. On murals, Sihanouk is also depicted at the side of the monastery's venerable abbot, usually with Angkor Wat in the background, or when making donations to the monastery, all images symbolic of the monarchal power protecting Buddhism, social order and the promise of a return to the golden times of Angkor Wat.

With respect to the *Reamker*, the moral and ethical righteousness that Rama stands for are all the virtues that Cambodian kings tried to emulate and attain, thereby imbuing the epic with strong royal symbolism. The royal iconography associated with this tale is clearly visible through the depiction of a complete *Reamker* narrative on the murals decorating walls of the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda at the Royal Palace. In more recent times, the ceiling of the Khmer Throne Room was also painted with selected scenes of Rama's tale.

In Cambodia the Rama Epic should be understood in Theravada Buddhist terms. It is the Buddhist and moral interpretation of the relationship between the character Rama and kingship that explains the significant role this originally Brahmanistic tale has continued to play in the court culture and legitimization of kingship in Buddhist Cambodia. (Reynolds 1991).

Ritual Use and Performance of the Reamker

While it is important to consider the narrative sequence in the visual depiction of the episodes, it is also essential to keep in mind that texts such as the *Reamker* have had a profoundly ritualistic function in Cambodian culture and religion, and that individual scenes can have special significance. Specific episodes from this epic are frequently dramatized in ritual performances for the well-being of villages, and by extension, the Cambodian nation. Consider, for example, the circumstances inspiring the representation of the episode of the Battle of Lanka, when Kumbhakarna, Ravana's brother, is told by his wicked brother to assume gigantic form and lie across the river to prevent the water from reaching Rama's monkey army. This episode is often performed in the drought season to beg for the 'release of waters', thus demonstrating the integration of ancient narrative with contemporary life.

Tradition and Continuity

The continued relevance of the Rama Epic in Cambodian life can be seen in the persistence of the production of traditional paintings on cloth, using tempera on canvas and silk. An important contemporary exponent of the tale is the artist Chet Chan, who was trained in traditional painting at the School of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh in the early 1960s and continues to teach traditional painting on silk at that school (Ly Daravuth and Muan *Reamker* 2001: 123-151). Chet Chan also paints scenes from the *Reamker* at home. Like the unknown artists who painted the six exquisite paintings shown in the Bonn exhibition, Chet Chan draws some of his inspiration from the mural paintings at the Gallery of the Silver Pagoda and Wat Bo, Siem Reap. He is currently training his children to carry on his knowledge, skills, and the legacy of traditional painting. Thus, the Rama Epic remains deeply embedded in the politics and poetics of contemporary Cambodian arts and culture.

Wat Bo. A scene from the Rama Epic showing Indrajit disguised as Indra.

Buddhist Painting in Cambodia

Vittorio Roveda
Sothon Yem

Holcim

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Wat Kompong Tralach Leu. Guardian opening the door to the *vihara* where the Buddha is teaching.

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To understand Buddhist mural paintings, we must consider ourselves as pilgrims coming from a great distance in time and space in order to see the Buddha and read his teachings. We have heard of his words in audible form and now want to see them in a tangible form. Each mural is a page of the Buddha's teaching, transforming the vihara *into a book, a new text to be absorbed.*

cf. Roveda 2009

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See U Thaw Kaung for 2004 update related to Ramayana in Burma / Myanmar in contemporary Myanmar

A.D. 1970

THE RAMAYANA IN BURMA†

U THEIN HAN*

The first written Burmese version of the Ramayana hitherto known to us is a Thagyin ballad (poem in Thagyin rhymes), called Rama Thagyin by U Aung Phyo. It appeared in 1775(1137 Burmese Era) in Ava. However the archaeological and epigraphical evidences show that something of Valmiki Ramayana had been orally prevalent in Pagan since the 11th century A. D. The Nat Hlaung Kyaung temple (of Vishnu) considered to have been built by Anawrahta (1044-1077) depicted on its outer-wall the stone figures of Rama and Parasu Rama as Avatars of Vishnu. As Anawrahta also probably patronized the Petleik pagoda in Pagan, which depicted Rama of the Buddhist Dasaratha Jataka in one of its terra-cotta plaques, the two stories must be sifted, distinguished and explained in order to avoid confusion.

Further, the royal proclamations of king Kyanzittha (1084-1113) recorded in two of his Mon inscriptions, one in Pagan and one in Thaton district perhaps would make the Rama story of more immediate interest and therefore appealing to the wider public, when the king, in his account of his previous births, mentioned that he was born in the family of king Rama in the city of Ayodhapur and that he at that time defeated signally a great hostile army and that after the hostilities he gave happiness to all the people, made offerings, observed (the precepts of) virtue and did pious deed of diverse kinds.

Besides there are also two historical factors which could be considered congenial climate for the existence and spread of the story of Rama in Pagan, viz., (1) The presence in Pagan, as in other South-East Asian countries, of the Vaishnavite Brahman community from South and Eastern India who usually played a prominent role in the performance of Court rituals and ceremonies and (2) The Presence in Pagan, of the Mons from Thaton, who might have had an intimate connection with those of the Mon kingdoms of Haripunjay and Dvaravati then parts of the Khmer Empire in old Thailand.

After the fall of Pagan towards the end of the 13th century, the story might have been orally passed on from generation to generation in Ava, because literary evidences have been found to prove it. One of them is a reference to the Ramayana in the Burmese Pyo (Jataka poem) of 1527 (889 B. E.). The poet Shin Agga Thamadi

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who was a Buddhist monk warned his fellow monks, in the epilogue to his Thuwunnasham Thahtekhan(from Suvannasama Jataka) Pyo, to avoid telling the stories of Sita and Hanuman in public. This reference, though negative in character, evidently shows the continuity of the oral tradition of the Ramayana in Burma at least till the 16th century. By the first half of the 18th century, during the reign of the last king (1733-52) of the Toungoo dynasty two literary evidences are found to show that the Ramayana came to be regarded as a noble saga even among the Buddhist monks. The first evidence is the reference made by Minkyaung Sayadaw (Head of the Minkyaung Buddhist monastery) to the wisdom of Rama who welcomes the banished Bibhizana (Vibhisana) as a trustful ally. It tells the dramatic story of the quarrel between Dasagiri (Ravana) and Bibhizana in the war council, which leads to the banishment of the latter. It tells how Rama thoughtfully considers the advice of Bibhizana, i. e. the counsel to despoil the Victory Sacrifice about to be performed by Dasagiri, and also not to forget to ask Lakkhana (Laksmana) to show the direction in the sky of the invisible Indazita (Indrajit), Lakkhana being the only person in the army who can see the invisible as he has never looked at the face of woman for the past 12 years. The second evidence is the reference employed as a literary allusion in the Manikhet play by Padetha Yaza, Minister in Ava, the allusion to the successful prayer of Dasaratha for the boon of progeny.

These two references suggest three points for consideration regarding the position of the Ramayana in that century. Firstly, the prayer of Dasaratha and the story of Bibhizana indicate the knowledge of the story from Balakanda to Yuddhakanda. Secondly, the Ramayana was appreciated not only for its aesthetic values but also for its ethical values. Thirdly, since both the competent exposition and sound judgement of Minkyaung Sayadaw of the facts about Bibhizana and the wisdom of Rama in the story could imply the existence of a written text, the story of Rama based on the oral tradition of old Pagan might have been already in writing between the 16th and the 18th centuries. This last point is found in agreement with U Aung Phyo the author of the first poem of Ramayana, hitherto known to us as the earliest. In his work he mentioned the existence of a traditional version and acknowledged his debt to his master from old Pagan.

U Aung Phyo was a professional balladist. Like Lava and Kusa he roamed about the country-side and sang his ballads including the Rama Thagyin of 1775. He became popular in Amarapura after the accession of Bodawpaya (1782-1819). He was later patronised by the king, but probably he was dead and gone before 1789 when a Royal Commission was appointed to produce a verse drama of Ramayana. In the composition of U Aung Phyo, the story of Rama begins with the physical and moral violence of Dasagiri and ends with his death at the hand of Rama in the Battle Royal. The gist of the story is as follows, with all the episodes in the same order of arrangement as described in Rama Thagyin (Rama ballad).

Iyantaka the king of demons in Lanka has a daughter Niyakkhama. She is so pure in her soul that she leaves the mundane world for a hermitage in the forest. There she practises austerities and recites Brahma mantra. Brahma, being pleased with her penance and piety, grants her the boon of progeny. For her offering of a

stalk of ten mango fruits, ten-headed Dasagiri is born to her. Then two more so[illegible] Kumbi Kanna (Kumbhakarna) and Bibhizana are born later. On their return to th[illegible] City of Lanka, Dasagiri is crowned king of Rakshasas in Lanka.

Dasagiri having enjoyed the taste of the Artharwati fruit, becomes the slav[illegible] of temptations. Once on one of his excursions by aerial chariot he sees on the Gand-hamana mountain a beautiful fairy engaged in observance of Athanga Sila (Eight Precepts) and religious meditation. The fairy defies his immorality and curses him, and then descending to the earth, kindles a fire and enters the flames. Later the fairy emerges from the earth as a baby. When the baby is brought to Lanka, the terrified Dasagiri puts the baby in a box and lets the box float down the ocean. The box reaches the bank near the city of Mithila. King Janaka, on the advice of his Brahmans comes to the bank and while ploughing the ground for sacrifice sees the baby and adopts her as his own daughter.

In the meantime one great event happens in the kingdom of Ayodhya. On one of his hunting expeditions in the forest, king Dasaratha desirous of trying his Bow, the gift of Inda, shoots forth the arrow in the direction of the splashing sound of water. The arrow hits an ascetic who is filling his pitcher with water. The king later meets the blind parents of the ascetic, who curse him and show him the path to the hermitage of the great Trisula. Trisula, at the request of the king, grants him the boon of progeny, giving him two sacred plantain fruits for his three queens. The queens eat the fruits, and after the lapse of ten months, Rama the Bodhisat is born to queen Kothalla (Kausalya), Bhadra (Bharata) and Lakkhana to queen Kaike (Kaikeyi), and Thatrugana (Satrughna) to queen Thumitra (Sumitra) in Ayodhya.

Then the story of Rama in U Aung Phyo's Thagyin begins to move. Bodaw hermit (Visvamitra) goes to Ayodhya and seeks the king's help to punish Kakawun the demon-crow which used to molest the hermits' sacrificial fire. Rama comes to the hermitage, blinds one eye of Kakawun and drives it away.

In Mithila, king Janaka sends invitations to each of a hundred kings including Dasagiri to participate in the Bow Contest as a competitor for the hand of Sita. The stipulation is for each competitor to lift up and string the Bow. To this Contest come Bodaw hermit and Rama as the king's guests, and also Dasagiri as a competitor. In the Bow Contest Dasagiri alone is able to lift the Bow but the arrogant Dasagiri despite his failure to string it, demands the hand of Sita. At this dramatic moment Rama comes to the rescue of Sita simply to defy Dasagiri. Rama lifts it up high and after having fixed the string draws it to such tension that the Bow breaks into two. Rama wins Sita.

After the nuptials of Rama and the three brothers, they return to Ayodhya. On the way Rama foils Parasu Rama's attempt to seize Sita. Then follow the well known episodes of Kaike's conspiracy to enthrone her son Bhadra; of Rama's farewell obeisances and pathetic partings; of the journey of Rama, Sita and Lakkhana to the Hmawyone forest (Dandaka); and of Bhadra's pilgrimage in quest of Rama and his return with Rama's sandals.

After twelve years' exile when the "Three" are about to return to Ayodhya two Rakshasas Dutha (Dushana) and Khara who molest them are killed. Then follow the episodes of Gambi (the mother of Dutha and Khara) appealing to her brother Dasagiri and revealing her plan for the abduction of Sita; of Gambi in the guise of a golden deer luring Rama away from the hermitage; of Dasagiri in the guise of a hermit carrying Sita off in his aerial chariot; and of the wanderings of Rama and Lakkhana in arch of Sita in the Hmawyone forest.

As they arrive at a spreading Gyo tree (Schleichera Trijuga), the tired Rama, resting his head on the chest of Lakkhana sleeps soundly when a giant gadfly comes upon the back of Lakkhana and sucks the blood. Lakkhana, inspite of great pain, restrains himself from driving off the gadfly, lest his brother's sleep should be disturbed, It happens that Thugyeik the exiled monkey king is hiding on the top of Gyo tree, away from the menace of his elder brother Bali (Vali) who has usurped his throne, When Thugyeik notices Lakkhana patiently enduring the pain, the thought of his wicked brother comes to his mind, As he weeps, his big tear-drops fall on the chest of Rama who is rudely roused from his sleep. At the sight of Thugyeik, Rama takes up the bow. Thugyeik comes down and supplicates Rama telling his woeful tale. When Rama relates the sudden disappearance of Sita, Thugyeik enters into alliance with Rama and promises to help bring Sita back from Lanka.

The plan is to send someone as a scout to Lanka, but when it is found that the monkey heroes are not strong enough to leap across the ocean and reach Lanka, Zabuman (Jambavan) presents, to the surprise of Rama, a small monkey by the name Hanuman and reveals the adversities of Hanuman under a curse. Zabuman concludes his tale by appealing to Rama to make three gentle strokes on the back of Hanuman. When Rama does so, Hanuman regains his original size and strength.

Then in the story follow the episodes of the leap of Hanuman; of his nocturnal search for Sita in the palace chambers or Dasagiri; of Sita being threatened by Dasagiri in the Asoka garden; of Hanuman's presentation of Rama's signet-ring to Sita; of the havoc and terror spread by Hanuman as a warning to Dasagiri; of Hanuman's fight with Indazita; of his tail being bundled with cloth and set fire to; and of Lanka in flames after Hanuman's exploit with his fiery tail.

The Yuddhakanda in Rama Thagyin describes remarkably few battles in the war of Lanka. It describes the building of the causeway across the ocean and also the incident in which the giant crab Gandama caught by Hanuman is deprived of her claws; the sending of Aunggut (Angada) as an envoy of Rama to Dasagiri; Dasagiri's war council and the banishment of Bibhizana; the first battle of Rama and Indazita in which Rama is struck down by the latter's Serpent-darts and the procurement of a magic herb by Hanuman; the second battle of Rama and Indazita in which the invisible Indazita is killed by Rama, being spotted by Lakkhana who alone can see and point out the invisible foe because he has never looked at the face of woman for the past twelve years; the battle of Rama and Kumbikhanna, the Victory Sacrifice of Dasagiri sabotaged by Aunggut and Hanuman; and the Battle Royal: Rama versus Dasagiri. In the Battle Rama is first rendered unconscious by

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who carries away Rama by his magic to his Under-world; of Yakkhani who transforms herself into the dead body of Sita to deceive Rama; and of Hanuman who transforms himself into a putrid dog to prevent Thura Gomban Rakshasa from sharpening his powerful spear; and of the demon Hmanpya burnt to ashes at the sight of his own deadly side-glance reflected in the mirror of Hanuman. And in Uttarakanda it is enriched by the episode of the second banishment of Sita for drawing the portrait of Dasagiri. In Rama Thonmyo of 1904 and Alaung Rama Thagyin of 1905 is inserted the miraculous creation of Kutha (Kusa). In these three works the story ends with the second reunion of Rama and Sita.

In the case of the verse drama of Thiri Rama the story shows mainly the influence of Krittivasa particularly in the last two Kandas. Its Uttarakanda has three more episodes of Rama hearing the song of Ramayana composed by Valmiki and sung by Bala (Lava) and Kutha, and of Sita returning to Mother Earth. It ends with the final episode of Rama entering the waters of the Tharazote (Sarayu) river. It is found that for the performance of the drama of Thiri Rama, Yodaya (Ayuthia) orchestra was used in addition to Burmese orchestra to play the tune of "Chut", "Cho Chon", "Cho Chan", "Cho Chin", "Cho Chut", "o-Cha", "Samoe", or "Phyeng Phyat Phyat", to suit the mood of a particular scene of action on the stage.

This is the general account of the emergence of the great Indian epic in Burma, remodelled by the Burmese writers and accepted by the people in accordance with their moral sense and artistic taste. An extensive study of the subject is still to be made by our scholars. To some extent this Seminar in Indonesia may be helpful to our future effort.

We will now consider the place of the Ramayana in the cultural and social life of the Burmese people. The epic in Burmese garb, though it has not taken a religious role in Burma, is highly respected like the noble vernacular versions of the great Jatakas (Maha Nipata) such as Vessantara, Mahosadha and Vidura by U Awbatha of Minbu. It is not only a literary treasure but also a source of ennobling influences on the relationships of men as parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, relations and friends, teachers and pupils, and rulers and the ruled. Its influence further inspires and permeates Burmese dramatic performances and other arts and crafts.

In the three classics of Rama Thagyin, Maha Rama and Thiri Rama, Hindu holiness is replaced by Buddhist holiness in the personality of Rama. Rama the Bodhisat king is the appellation used in all these works. It can not be bigotry but the spirit of tolerance and assimilation which makes Rama a Bodhisat king, as Buddha has been made the ninth Avatar of Vishnu by the Vaishnavites in the same spirit.

The author of Maha Rama has taken the first opportunity of lending a Buddhist aura to his account of the birth of Rama. Instead of the gods with Gandharvas, Siddhas and holy sages of Valmiki Ramayana, Inda (Indra) with four Catumaharaj

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Devas and the guardian gods of forests, mountains and sky approach Brahma and inform him of Dasagiri's misdeeds and vice, whereupon Brahma pacifies them by saying that the boon granted to Dasagiri is only invulnerability from attacks by other creatures but not by men, monkeys and the Divine Baw. So Inda implores the Bodhisat Deva and three others in Tusita Heaven to reincarnate as men in Ayodhya, and also millions of other Devas as mighty monkeys in Kithakinda to put an end to the menace of Dasagiri. All these reincarnations take place, when the three queens of king Dasaratha have eaten the two sacred plantain fruits brought by the king from a great hermit to whom he has prayed for the boon of progeny. Undoubtedly this description reminds any Buddhist of the account of the birth of Siddattha, the last Bodhisat prince in the life of Gotama Buddha.

Among the players who take the leading character roles of Bodaw hermit, Rama, Sita, Lakkhana, Parasu Rama, Hanuman and Dasagiri in the dramatic performance of Ramayana, not only Rama but also the other characters are honoured as (sort of) gods. Their propitiation ceremonies usually held before the first night performance and in front of the colourful masks are awe-inspiring.

As an illustration of the moral values preached in Valmiki Ramayana, Maha Rama is the best of the three Burmese classics. Rama Thagyin is too short to elaborate the moral aspects of the situations in the life of Rama, while Thiri Rama with new battle scenes and new super-natural elements added in abundance is too long to give relative significance to the moral aspects of the story. The narration in Maha Rama has taste and restraint in the use of the battle scenes, and successfully balances supernatural elements and human elements, sensation and contemplation. It succeeds in drawing the character of Rama as an obedient son, a loving brother, a faithful husband, a chivalrous fighter, a righteous prince and a compassionate leader; of Lakkhana as an affectionate and loyal brother; of Sita as a chaste and loving wife; of Hanuman as a loyal and efficient lieutenant and of Dasagiri as a sinful and "selfwilled and self-deceived" monarch. The portrayal of the relationship of the members, except queen Kaike, of Dasaratha's family in various situations reminds us of the values preached in the Sigala Sutta and the Mangala Sutta. In our dramatic performances too, some of the popular scenes which emphasize the same values are those that portray the journey of Bodaw hermit, Rama and Lakkhana to Mithila, the Bow contest at Mithila, the conspiracy of queen Kaike, the banishment of Rama from Ayodhya, the meeting of Rama with Bhadra at the hermitage of Valmiki, the mission of Hanuman to Lanka in quest of Sita, and the Fire-Bath of Sita.

The popularity of the Ramayana in Burma reached its zenith in the first half of the 19th century, when the story of Rama was depicted in a continuous series of 347 stone relief sculptures at the pagoda of Maha Loka Mara-zein built in 1849 in honour of Maungdaung Sayadaw, the chief Buddhist Primate of Amarapura. The sculptures evinced the influence of the drama of Thiri Rama. One episode which was added to the series was the well known interpolation of the miraculous creation of Sita's second son Kutha. Old wood-carvings and old lacquer-ware had the favourite scenes from Ramayana depioted thereon. The carving of the figure of Hanuman as a potent talisman upon the ivory or bone handles of daggers or swords was a local

custom. Several songs, some in classical Burmese tunes and some in tunes adapted from Yodaya tunes were composed with such themes as the luring away of Rama by the enchanted deer, the abduction of Sita, the lamenations of Sita in Lanka and of Rama in the Hmawyone forest, and the meeting of Rama with Thugyeik. They are still the favourites of our music troupes.

To-day the progress of reading interests in the Ramayana is considered fairly satisfactory, as four more works were published, two before and two after the second world war. In the case of the stage performance, the progress tells a different story. In the old days stage performances as well as marionette performances of the drama of Ramayana were magnificently presented in the palace by the Royal Troupes of professional artists. The political change after 1885 brought a change also in the lives of the artists. In the absence of royal patronage, they had to seek patronage from the general public. However after the first decade of the twentieth century the performances by professional artists declined, and later were abandoned. Since then the torch was and is still kept burning by the Ramayana dramatic clubs formed in Rangoon and some of the district towns such as Pyapon, Bogale, Henzada etc. and maintained by public subscriptions. The lovers of the dramatic art of Ramayana took lessons from the professionals of the ex-royal troupes and then handed down the art to the succeeding generations in the spirit of service to the community. In Mandalay and Amarapura the worship of Rama and the annual performance of the drama are carried on by Ponnas, the descendents of the Burmese Brahmans of both Bengali and Manipuri origins.

It is common knowledge that the great Indian epic of Ramayana is a world classic and that its influence stands in South-East Asian countries, "as long as mountains stand and rivers flow on the surface of the earth". Therefore one of the problems to-day is how to make its influence effective on the new youths. We may be allowed to submit only three suggestions. We suggest (1) that rewriting of a good modern vernacular prose work based on its own traditional Ramayana should be considered in each country, if older works are archaic in style and cumbersome in form, (2) that in our dramatic performances those episodes that balance sensation and contemplation should be emphasized, and (3) that staging of the drama ought to be to the taste of the new youths without adversely affecting the essence of the traditional style. Of course the suggestions are tentative. They may be considered, if they are worthy of your consideration, at this great Seminar of the First International Ramayana Festival.

To understand the theatrical performance in Burma of the Ramayana, a few words would be necessary to explain the classical Burmese theatre still in the public esteem in Burma. It is called Zat Pwe or Zat Gyi. Traditionally no drop-curtains nor scenic aids are used on the Zat Pwe stage. In the case of the Ramayana Zat Pwe, there are two door-ways down-stage for the entry or exit of the actors; and between the two door-ways is an alcove where all the colourful Ramayana Masks are displayed on a high shelf.

The characteristic features of Zat Pwe are firstly, the combinations of acting and dialogue, dance and recitations, song and speech, and dance and dramatic action

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As planned by Dasagiri the enchanted deer, too beautiful to be true, succeeds in enticing innocent Sita. Rama tries to tell Sita that this deer is in fact a demon in disguise. But Sita's ears are deaf to Rama's warnings. Equally, Rama's love of Sita overwhelms his own sense of danger. So Rama goes after the deer and is lured into the deep forest farther and farther away from his beloved Sita.

EXCERPT FOUR ; Sita rejecting Dasagiri's courtship.

The scene is laid in the Asoka garden. The object of this scene is to portray Sita's determination not to surrender to the temptations of Dasagiri. The scene tries to portray as follows.

The demoness attendent persuades Sita. She glorifies Dasagiri his aerial chariot and his enormous wealth, failing which she tries to amuse Sita. All of a sudden Dasagiri appears. Now follows Dasagiri's ardent attempt to win the love of Sita. In the dance duet the shawl of Sita plays a strategic part. It is a defence, a shield' a buttress of rejection. Sita wields the shawl effectively against Dasagiri's onset from all directions. To borrow a Greek simile, all the love-darts of Dasagiri are turned and blocked by the defence bastion of the shawl. Sita remains chaste.

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RAMAYANA IN BURMESE LITERATURE AND ARTS †

U Thein Han and U Khin Zaw *

In Burma, so far as our researches on Ramayana up to 1972 reveal, the earliest written work is the Rama Thagyin of 1775** by U Aung Phyo. But in 1973 a new find was made of two palm-leaf MSS of the Rama story called the Rama Vathu,*** one in a Buddhist monastery in Pagan-Nyaung-U area and the other in a monastery (Kyaikwaing) near Rangoon. From the study of this Rama story in these two newly found MSS, it is found that the colloquial style, the use of archaic spelling symbols and U Aung Phyo's own admission (that he based his Thayin on an older Rama story) support the theory to date that the newly discovered Rama Vatthu was reduced to writing in the 17th century.

Oral tradition of the Rama story, however, may be said to have started as far back as the reign of King Anawrahta of the 11th century A. D. In Nat-Hlaung Kyaung (Vishnu Temple) in old Pagan are stone figures of Rama and Parasu Rama. So also the Rama story in the Jataka series of terracotta plaques in Petleik pagoda contemporaneously in old pagan.

Besides in a stone inscription in Mon language King Kyansittha (1084 - 1113) proclaimed to his subjects that he had in a previoue existence been a close relative of Rama in Ayodhya. The presence of Vaishnava Brahmans in old Pagan who played important parts on the royal ceremonial occasions of those days is also one historical factor. All these are pointed out by scholars as the evidences of Rama tradition then extant, handed down from mouth to mouth up to the end of the 16th century, as one post-Pagan evidence is found in the Epilogue of Suvanna Sama Jataka poem written in 1527. And again there is the mention of Vibhishna by Minkyaung Sayadaw in his commentary on a well-known Epistle in the 18th century, and also a Citation of Rama in Padetha Yaza's Mani Ket play in the same century.

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** U Thein Han; "The Ramayana in Burma", Studies in Indo-Asian Art and Culture, Volume 2, March 1973, The International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi; The Guardian Magazine, Vol. 20, No.7 (July, 1973), The Guardian Press Rangoon.

*** Photo Copy of the palm-leaf MSS of the Rama Vatthu. Universities' Publication Committee, Sarpaybeikman, Rangoon, 1974.

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It maintains the spirit of Valmiki Ramayana both in characterization and plot, and in motivation. In Burmese literature the Rama Vatthu is considered to represent the traditional Burmese version. It has served as the well-spring of later Burmese versions althought the latter bring in several new episodes and new characters in the course of time. However it is found that later versions are fundamentally faithful to the tradition.

Maha Rama

It was probably composed in late 18th century or early 19th century. This version in fact is a mere enlargement of the Rama Vatthu. Prose is simple and dignified. Embellishment (Alankara) is richer. For instance, Sita is described as being born of a lotus bud, instead of the Earth.

Its special feature is the insertion of 4 new episodes in Yuddha Kanda section. They are of Gombadipa (Mahiravana) cariying away Rama to his underworld by his magic; of Yakkhani who transforms herself into the dead body of Sita to deceive Rama; of Gamuttara who transforms himself into a putrid dog to prevent demon Thura Gomban from sharpening his powerful spear, and of the demon Hman-pya burnt to ashes at the sight of his own deadly side-glance reflected in the mirror brought by Hanuman to the battle field.

Rama Thonmyo by Saya Htwe

It was published in 1904. According to Saya Htwe, his work is the product of what he has taken down from the verbal accounts of the marionette dramatists. Several deviations appear in the work. Some of the well-known names have become misnomers. For instance King Janaka has become Maha Zanapada; queen Kausalya, Paduma Thinkha and queen Kaikeyi, Kakkaruvati. The most serious deviation is the account of Sita immediately brought back to Rama by Hanuman after the burning of Lanka. Of the few innovations, the episode of the Bow Contest is one. The Bow Contest invitation parchment with Sita's portrait, blown away by the wind, falls into the hands of Dasagiri in Lanka. A well-known interpolation common to the Southeast Asian versions is the episode of Sita and the she-monkey; and of the miraculous birth of Kusa in Saya Htwe's work.

Rama Thagyin by U Aung Phyo.

In this poem U Aung Phyo uses the story of the Rama Vatthu up to the end of Yuddha Kanda. The content of the poem is nearly the same as the content of the Rama Vatthu. It is effective both in plot and characterization. U Aung Phyo, a professional balladist, roamed about the country-side and sang his Thagyin, which is responsible for the popularity of the Rama story even in remote villages.

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Rama Yagan by U Toe.

U Toe, poet and courtier composed his Yagan goem in 1784. The poem is incomplete, the last scene being the meeting of Rama with Thugyeik under the Gyo tree (Schleichera Trijuga). There is fundamentally nothing new in the content of the poem, except that the Rama story inspires one of the best poems in Burmese Literature. It is touched up by local colour.

Alaung Rama Thagyin by Saya Htun.

Like U Aung Phyo, Saya Htun is a balladist well known both in Arakan and in the valley of the Irrawaddy. He benefits from all the previous compositions so that his work is enriched by the accumulation. However his work is not without Arakanese folk-ways in some dramatic situations. To cite an example. When Dasagiri, in order to test the prowess of Rama on the eve of the Bow contest, buries his spear deep in the ground and asks Rama to pluck it out, Rama does so easily with his toes.

Thiri Rama by Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung.

The drama was probably written in late 18th century or early 19th century. The dating is still as problematical as the dating of the Maha Rama. According to Nemyo, the drama is definitely a re-presentation based on a certain earlier work. Perhaps that earlier work might have been a production of Royal Cultural Commission appointed in 1789 in Amarapura, with a view to dramatising "the legends and stories brought from the Gyun (Krom) capital of the Kingdom of Ayuthia and the Yun capital of the Kingdom of Haripunja". However if the production of the Commission were somewhat like the Ramakien (1798) of Rama I, which "was probably written on the model of an older work prevalent in Ayuddhaya but lost perhaps in the holocaust of 1767".* the Thiri Rama ought to bear some resemblance to the Ramakien. But the Thiri Rama drama is found to be a different work. Anyway the earlier work has not been discovered yet or might have been lost.

The drama of Thiri Rama is written both in prose and verse, and in three bundles having not less than 1320 palm-leaf MSS pages. There is no division into Acts but a continuous succession of scenes.

Three remarkable features of the drama may be discussed. Firstly there are some slight variations made in the traditional episodes. For instance, Inda goes to and implores Lord Narayana, instead of the Bodhisat Deva, to incarnate as Rama. Then the coming of uninvited Dasagiri to and the absence of Parasu Rama at the Bow contest. Kakawun is replaced by a demon; and Gambi by Sappanakha. Maricha takes the part of the enchanted deer.

* Dhaninivat: "The Ramakien", Fiftieth Anniveraary Publications No. 1 (BRSFAP), Burma Research Society, Rangoon. 1961.

of the scenes the dancer was to express the theme and portray the moods and emotions through mimetic gestures and posturings, all in stylised forms. Michael Symes also noted that the Burmese marionette stage was flourishing. According to Saya Htwe of "Rama Thonmyo", the Rama play was also performed on the marionette stage.

Dramatic Presentation.

With regard to the presentation of the Rama play, there seemed to be not much difference in the practices of those days and nowadays.

If we analyse the Burmese presentation of the Rama play as members of the audience watching the live stage or marionette stage, we notice four techniques.

(1) Dramatic words and gestures. (2) Dramatic words interspered with relevant songs. (3) Dramatic recitative with musical background. (4) Dance and miming to music pertaining to the dramatic situation.

For the first three techniques, the players lift up their masks for dialogue, recitation or singing. For the fourth technique here is an example. When Hanuman, in search of Sita in Dasagiri's stronghold in Lanka, enters the citadel, the musical direction to the orchestra is, "Play Chut" (the conventional music of stealth) and Hanuman proceeds dancing the stealthy approach.

We know from musical directions to the orchestras in the drama of Thiri Rama, that Burmese and Yodaya (Ayuthia) types of orchestras were used. The specially composed mood music of modern radio and TV plays was unknown. But there were conventional musical pieces well known to the audience for all moods and situations, as shown by Musical Direction* to both Burmese and Yodaya orchestras.

Over and above the songs and music that belong to the Rama play, we have in the Burmese classical repertoire several songs inspired by the story of Rama and Sita. Some in classical Burmese tunes and some adapted from Yodaya tunes were used in the compositions with such themes as the luring away of Rama by the enchanted deer, the abduction of Sita, the lamentations of Sita in Lanka and of Rama in the Hmawyone forest and the meeting of Rama with Thugyeik at the Gyo tree. Most of them were written in the late 19th century.

Rama Play after 1885.

The Rama play on she Burmese stage did not have as happy fate as the Rama play in Burmese Literature. At the end of 1885 after the annexation of Upper Burma, the palace Troupe numbering over a hundred were disorganised and displaced. Some of them banded together and ventured into the world of public entertainment, thus

* See Appendir 11

bringing the Rama play to the masses. Some of them came down to Lower Burma, and in towns where they settled they met Rama Play enthusiasts with whom they formed Rama Play Clubs and taught and coached more Rama Play perfomers. Of them the two clubs in Rangoon and the one in the delta region are still carrying on the torch of the Rama tradition in the spirit of service to the community.

On the stage of the National Theatre of the Ministry of Culture the emphasis is now on the fourth technique of dance and miming to music in the attempt to revive the popularity of the Rama play both at home and abroad, to capture the imagination of the new generation and to preserve the national heritage of the Burmese people, although the other three techniques are also in use.

Appendix I.

[The Rama Vatthu is summarised with all the episodes in the same order of arrangement as described in the Rama Vatthu.]

The first chapter deals with the origins of Dasagiri (Ravana) and his brothers and the story of Bali. The chapter describes how the ten-headed Dasagiri is born to Gonti, as a result of Gonti's austerities and her offering of ten mango fruits to Brahma; and how Kumba Kanna (Kumbhakarna) and Bhibhithana (Vibhishana) are born later.

Then the chapter further describes how Dasagiri is crowned King of Theinkho (Lanka); how he morally degenerates due to his execssive love of intoxicating juice of flowers and fruits offered by the gods; how he insults the Gandhaba Fairy on the Kelathapha mountain; and then how the fairy curses him and descending to the earth enters the holy flames.

In the same chapter Bali (Vali) in Kitha-Kindha (Kishkindha) seizes Dasagiri who yields to the might of Bali and becomes his friend.

The second chapter deals with the birth of Rama and the three brothers in Ayuttaya (Ayuddhaya). It describes how Datharattha(Dasaratha), on one of his hunting expeditions, has unwittingly killed a young hermit; how Datharattha receives two sacred plantains as a boon of progeny; and how his three queens later eat them.

The chapter further describes how, in the mean time the guardian gods of the earth make a request to Brahma through Inda for the destruction of sinful Dasagiri; how the Bodhisat Deva and three others in Tusita Heaven incarnate as Rama and his three brothers Bharata. Lakkhana (Lakshmana) and Thatrugana (Satrughana); and how the other devas incarnate as Vanaras in Kitha Kindha.

The third chapter deals with the birth of Sita. It describes how the Gandhaba fairy is born of the earth, brought to Theinkho, put in an iron box and sunk in the ocean by Dasagiri; then how the iron box reaches Mithila, the city of king Janaka and how Janaka adopts Sita as his own daughter.

The fourth chapter deals with the Bow Contest at Mithila. At this stage the story of Rama begins to move. The baby has grown up into a beautiful maiden who is now the cynosure of a hundred kings. The problem is solved by Janaka by sending invitations to all of them including Dasagiri. At the Bow contest, Dasagiri alone is able to lift up the Bow. Although he can not string the Bow, he insolently demands the hand of Sita.

The chapter further describes how Rama and Lakkhana who, having punished Kakawunna the demon crow accompanies their guru Kotampa to Mithila to see the great Bow and how at the critical moment Rama enters the Bow Contest, lifts up and strings the Bow and wins Sita. Then after the Nuptials of Rama and the three brothers at Mithila, they return to Ayuttaya On the way Prashu Rama (Parasu Rama) being instigated by the loser kings attempts to fight Rama. But the attempt is foiled.

The fifth chapter deals with the banishment of Rama. At Ayuttaya queen Koke (Kaikeyi), being misguided by the malicious Kuppaci, enters the House of Anger, reminds Datharattha of his solemn promise, and demands him to banish Rama and enthrone his son Bharata. Then follow the scenes of Datharattha's agonies; of Rama's resolve to uphold the pledge of his father; of Sita's courage; of Lakkhana's loyalty; of the willing consent of Kosalla (Kausalya) and Thumitta (Sumitra); of Rama's pathetic partings; of the sorrows of the people of the Ayuttaya; of the departure of Rama, Sita and Lakkhana; and of their arrival at the hermitage of Balamigi (Valmiki).

The sixth chapter deals with Bharata's attempt to enthrone Rama and the brith of Hanuman. The scenes are of the death of the grief-stricken Datharattha; of Bharata's righteous indignation in Ayuttaya; and of his pilgrimage in quest of Rama and his return with Rama's sandals. Then the story of the brith of Hanuman. How he tries to pluck the red sun mistaking it for his 'Kinbon' fruit; how he is struck down by Inda's thunderbolt; how by Inda at the request of his father wind god, he is blessed with the boon of immortality; then how he becomes an ordinary Vanara as a result of the curses of the hermits; and then how the hermits, at the request of Zambuman (Jambavan), prophesy that Hanuman would regain his might when he meets Rama on the eve of Rama's march to Theinkho.

The palm-leaf MSS has altogether about 80 MSS pages, out of which 40 are devoted to Bala and Ayodhya Kandas in 6 chapters in the Rama Vatthu.

The Rama Vatthu takes up the remaining 5 Kandas in a single chapter. The scenes are of the arrival of Rama, Sita and Lakkhana at a forest near the ocean

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The chapter further describes how Rama and Lakkhana who, having punished Kakawunna the demon crow accompanies their guru Kotampa to Mithila to see the great Bow and how at the critical moment Rama enters the Bow Contest, lifts up and strings the Bow and wins Sita. Then after the Nuptials of Rama and the three brothers at Mithila, they return to Ayuttaya On the way Prashu Rama (Parasu Rama) being instigated by the loser kings attempts to fight Rama. But the attempt is foiled.

The fifth chapter deals with the banishment of Rama. At Ayuttaya queen Koke (Kaikeyi), being misguided by the malicious Kuppaci, enters the House of Anger, reminds Datharattha of his solemn promise, and demands him to banish Rama and enthrone his son Bharata. Then follow the scenes of Datharattha's agonies; of Rama's resolve to uphold the pledge of his father; of Sita's courage; of Lakkhana's loyalty; of the willing consent of Kosalla (Kausalya) and Thumitta (Sumitra); of Rama's pathetic partings; of the sorrows of the people of the Ayuttaya; of the departure of Rama, Sita and Lakkhana; and of their arrival at the hermitage of Balamigi (Valmiki).

The sixth chapter deals with Bharata's attempt to enthrone Rama and the brith of Hanuman. The scenes are of the death of the grief-stricken Datharattha; of Bharata's righteous indignation in Ayuttaya; and of his pilgrimage in quest of Rama and his return with Rama's sandals. Then the story of the brith of Hanuman. How he tries to pluck the red sun mistaking it for his 'Kinbon' fruit; how he is struck down by Inda's thunderbolt; how by Inda at the request of his father wind god, he is blessed with the boon of immortality; then how he becomes an ordinary Vanara as a result of the curses of the hermits; and then how the hermits, at the request of Zambuman (Jambavan), prophesy that Hanuman would regain his might when he meets Rama on the eve of Rama's march to Theinkho.

The palm-leaf MSS has altogether about 80 MSS pages, out of which 40 are devoted to Bala and Ayodhya Kandas in 6 chapters in the Rama Vatthu.

The Rama Vatthu takes up the remaining 5 Kandas in a single chapter. The scenes are of the arrival of Rama, Sita and Lakkhana at a forest near the ocean

[From more than three hundred stone relief sculptures (14 square inches each) of the saga of Rama ornamenting the Loka Marazein pagoda built in 1849, in commemoration of the Buddhist Pontiff U Nyeyya Dhamma at the birth-place of His Holiness (now Ywagyi village), Budalin Township, Upper Burma.]

PLATE I YOUTHFUL RAMA AND LAKKHANA OF AYUDDHAYA FOLLOWED THE HERMIT KOTAMPA (VISHVAMISTRA) TO THE LATTER'S FOREST HERMITAGE TO PUNISH THE DEMON CROW.

PLATE 2 THE GRAND DISPLAY OF THE DIVINE BOW AND ARROWS AT THE BOW CONTEST PANDAL IN MITHILA.

PLATE 3 RAMA BENDS AND STRINGS THE BOW AT THE BO
CONTEST.

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PLATE 4 RAMA, SITA AND LAKKHANA LEAVE AYUDDHAYA FOR HMAW-YONE FOREST, HAVING PROMISED TO LIVE IN EXILE FOR 12 YEARS.

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PLATE 3 RAMA BENDS AND STRINGS THE BOW AT THE BOW CONTEST.

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PLATE 5 GAMBI LAMENTS THE DEATH OF HER TWO SONS DUTHA AND KHARA IN HMAW-YONE FOREST.

PLATE 6 DASAGIRI CARRIES OFF SITA IN HIS AERIAL CHARIOT TO THEIN KHO (LANKA).

PLATE 7 RAMA CHASES THE MAGIC DEER WHICH IS THE WILY GAMBI.

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PLATE 8 MISTAKING HIM FOR AN ENEMY, RAMA IS ABOUT TO PUNISH THUGYEIK WHO IS HIDING ON THE GYO TREE.

PLATE 9 HANUMAN MEETS SITA AND PRESENTS RAMA'S SIGNET RING IN THE THAWKA (ASOKA) GARDEN IN THEIN KHO.

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PLATE 10 MONKEYS HURL THE ROCKS INTO THE OCEAN TO CONSTRUCT A CAUSE-WAY UP TO THEIN KHO.

PLATE 11 HANUMAN SEIZES THE GIANT CRAB GANDAMA WHICH SECRETLY PULLS DOWN THE ROCKS TO DEMOLISH THE CAUSE-WAY.

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PLATE 12 INDA-ZITTA THROWS HIS SERPENT NOOSE DARTS AT RAMA IN THE FIRST BATTLE IN THEIN KHO.

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PLATE 13 HANUMAN CARRIES THE MOUNTAIN ON WHICH GROWS THE MAGIC MEDICINAL PLANT, FOR THE PURPOSE OF CURING RAMA WHO FELL SENSELESS ON THE BATTLE FIELD.

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PLATE 14 KUMBI KANNA ENTERS THE BATTLE FIELD, ONLY TO BE DEFEATED BY LAKKHANA.

PLATE 13 HANUMAN CARRIES THE MOUNTAIN ON WHICH GROWS THE MAGIC MEDICINAL PLANT, FOR THE PURPOSE OF CURING RAMA WHO FELL SENSELESS ON THE BATTLE FIELD.

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PLATE 14 KUMBI KANNA ENTERS THE BATTLE FIELD, ONLY TO BE DEFEATED BY LAKKHANA.

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PLATE 15 DASAGIRI ENTERS THE BATTLE FIELD, ONLY TO BE DEFEATED BY RAMA.

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PLATE 16 AFTER THE GREAT VICTORY OF RAMA IN THEIN KHO, SITA PROVES HER CHASTITY BY ENTERING THE HOLY LAMBENT FLAMES AND COMING OUT UNTOUCHED BY FIRE.

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after the lapse of 11 years; of the banishment of Thugyeik (Sugriva) by Bali in Kithakinda; of the demoness Trighata (Dasagiri's sister) with her two sons Kharu (Khara) and Tuthara (Dushana) coming to the forest camp of Rama; of the destruction of Trighata's sons; of Trighata and Dasagiri at Theinkho; of Trighata as an enchanted deer; of the abduction of Sita by Dasagiri; and of the wanderings of Rama and Lakkhana in search of Sita.

Then the Rama Vatthu continues the story, viz., the meeting of Rama with Thugyeik under Gyo tree; Thugyeik and the blood-sucking gadfly on the back of Lakkhana; Rama's alliance with Thugyeik; the destruction of Bali by Rama; Vanara army and Vanara generals; liberation of Hanuman from the curses of the hermits as a result of gentle stroking on his back by Rama; Hanuman's leap; Hanuman in Dasagiri's palace in search of Sita; Hanuman in the Thawka garden (Asoka) witnessing Sita reject Dasagiri; Rama's signet ring; Hanuman's fight with Indasitta (Indrajit); the burning of Theinkho; Hanuman's second meeting with Sita; and his return to Rama with the seven hairs of Sita.

Then the Rama Vatthu continues, viz., the constructing of the cause-way across the strait by Vanaras led by Hanuman; Hanuman's grabbing of the giant crab Gandham; the march of Vanara army to Theinkho; Aungkut (Angada) as an envoy; banishment of Bhibhithana and his friendship with Rama; Rama's fight with Indassitta and Rama's fall by Indisitta's Serpent-dart in the first encounter; restoring of Rama to life by Suvannapatta root brought by Hanuman from Gandhamana mountain; death of Indasitta, despite his power' of invisibility, hit by the arrow of Lakkhana in the second encounter; Dasagiri's Ritual interrupted by Hanuman; death of Kumba kanna; Rama's fight with Dasagiri and Dasagiri's withdrawal having lost his ten Makuta crowns in the first encounter; Rama made unconscious by the Thamohini weapon of Dasagiri but immediately saved by Hanuman; death of Dasagiri hit by the Divine Bow of Rama; Sita and the Fire Ordeal; Bhibhithana's installation to the throne in Theinkho; demobilisation of Vanara army, except Hanuman who stays with Rama; and the jubilant Return, and the Coronation in Ayuttaya.

Then the Rama Vatthu narrates the story of Uttara Kanda. It narrates Sita's drawing of Dasagiri's portrait; Sita's strong desire for the food from Balamigi's hemitage; washerman's doubt about Sita's fidelity; banishment of Sita; the brith of Lona and Kusha at Balamigi's hermitage; Rama's Ashvameda Yagna; the capture of the Horse and the fight between Lakkhana and Lona; the fight between Lakkhana and Kusha; the fight between Rama and his two sons; the lament of Sita; misunderstandings cleared and the restoration of the dead to life on the battle field by the holy water of Balamigi; and the return to Ayuttaya of Rama, Sita, their two sons and Lakkhana.

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Appendix II

[Some examples of Musical Directions with the beginning bars of the music in staff-notation.]

(1) Chut (yodaya) – Stealthy movement; Hanuman in search of Sita in Dasagiri's stronghold.

(2) & (3) Lokanat (Burmese) – March of Rama's allies.

(4) Nat–chin (Bur.) – The coming & going of devas.

(5) Natchin A–Yaing (Bur.) – Revelry, commotion, flight.

(6) Tha–gwin (Bur.) – Solemnity, grandeur.

(7) Le–than (Bur.) – Wind, storm.

(8) Moh–than (Bur.) – Rain god enters.
Rain of flowers.

(9) & (10) Tya–bwai (Bur.) – Recitative in song.

(11) Samo (Yod.) – Advance of Mahiravana ogre.

(12) Phyin–gya (Yod.) – Returning Kusa and Bala.

(13) & (15) Chut–chan (Yod.) – Rama in despond.
– Rama & Lakkhana in sorrow.

(14) Eik–chin (Bur.) – Rama & Lakkhana in repose.

(16) Phyin–phyat–phyat (Yod.) – Ogress attendant approaches Sita.

(17) A–yaing (Bur.) – Revelry, commotion, flight.
(Note. The above numbers correspond to the numbers on the musical examples in the following staff–notation).

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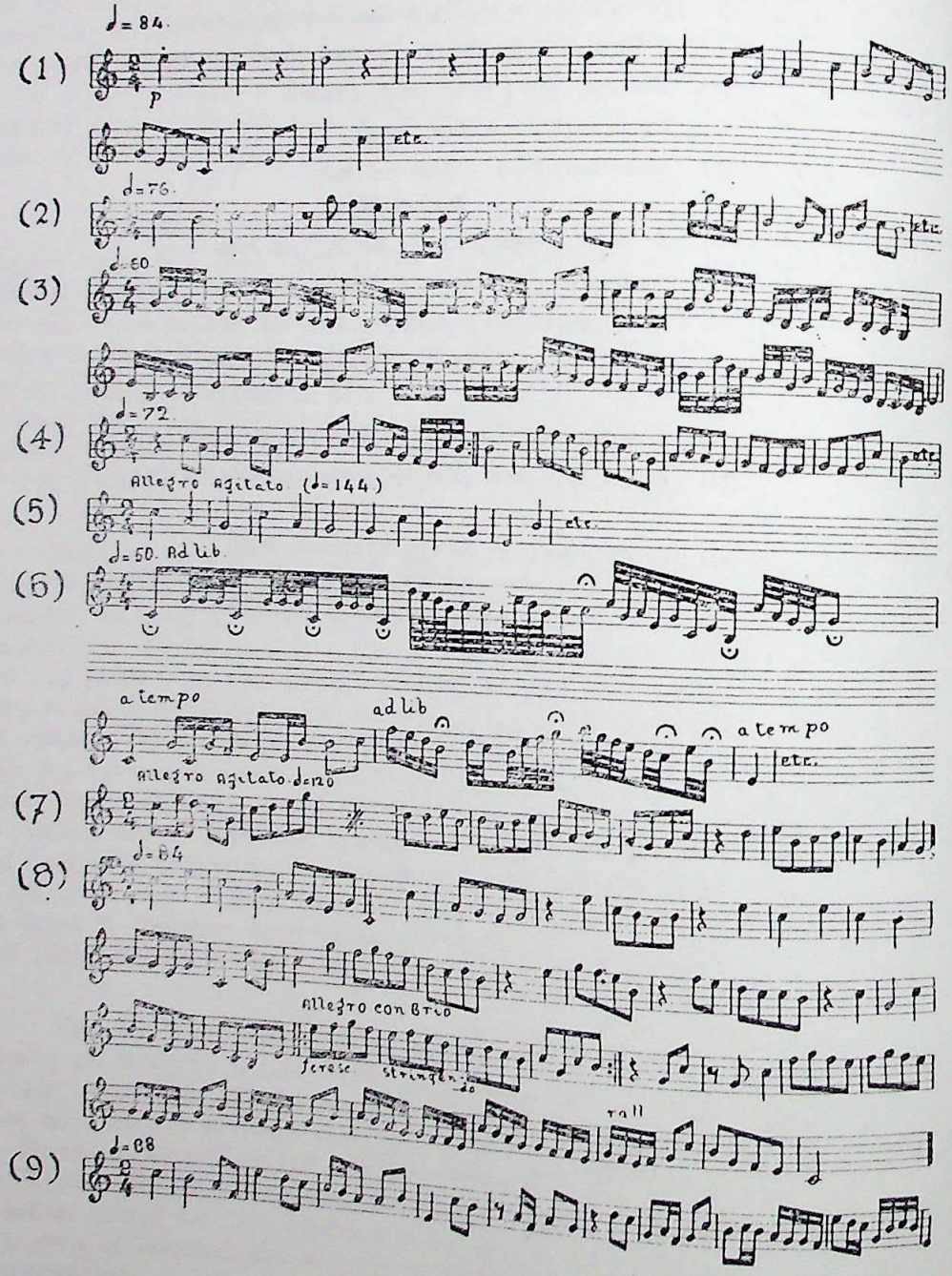

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(10) ♩=60 Ad lib a tempo

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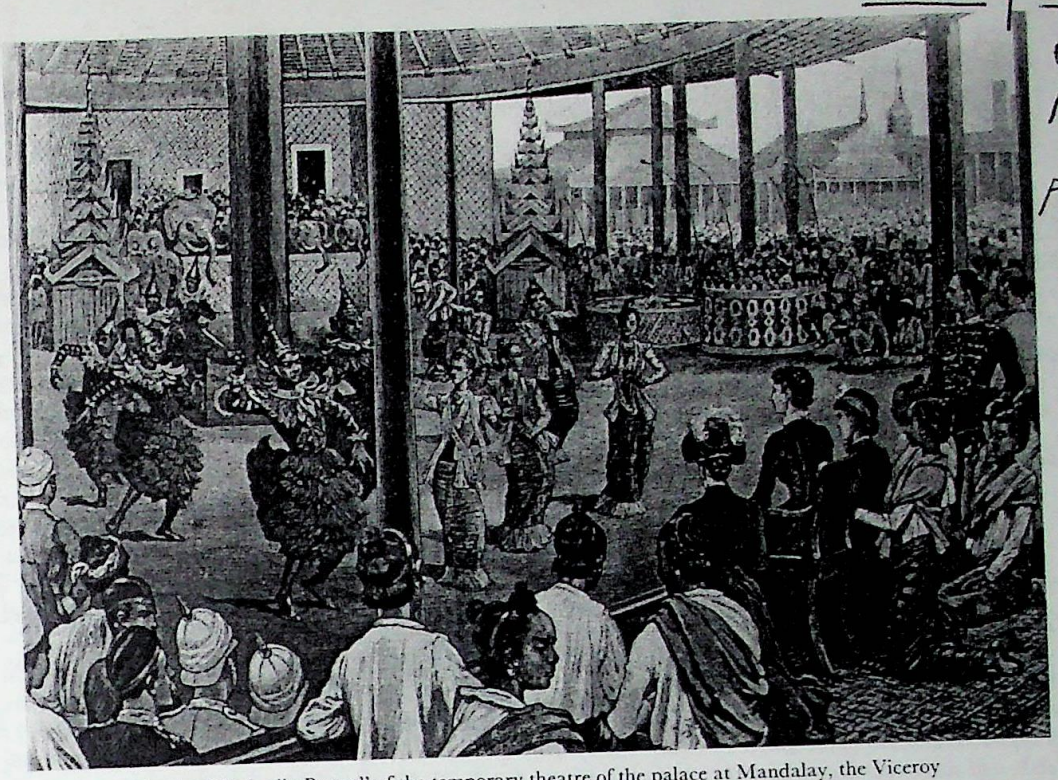


In the "Umbrella Room" of the temporary theatre of the palace at Mandalay, the Viceroy of India and Lady Dufferin watch the final performance by Burmese court dancers of the Yama Zatdaw (Ramayana) on February 15th, 1886

THE RAMAYANA AT THE BURMESE COURT

NOEL F. SINGER

Photographs and drawings by the author unless otherwise credited

A REPORT in *The Illustrated London News* for the 17th of April, 1886, said that during their tour of Burma, the Viceroy of India and Lady Dufferin had been entertained within the palace at Mandalay by dancers of the deposed King Theebaw. In one of the plays, the principal character, Rama, was "a princely warrior of the heroic age, shining in a corset of gilt and burnished copper scales, with amazing flounces about his legs, and with a helmet like a tiara or a pagoda".

The controlled and supple movements which were such a delight to Burmese eyes were seen by most foreigners as bizarre and grotesque. Sangermano, an Italian priest who was in Burma between 1783 and 1808 said that dancers of both sexes moved slowly, contorting their bodies, hands and fingers, and he added, quite unkindly, "the first time I saw these dancers, I took them for a troop of mad people".

Lady Dufferin thought the extraordinary postures suggested a bad pain somewhere. In her book, *Our Viceregal Life in India*, she said that the performance was "held in the 'Umbrella Room', a name which exactly describes its construction. A small pasteboard mountain close to the stick (central pillar) is all the scenery, and the spectators sit all the way round the edge of the open umbrella, except at one part where the actors are collected. The story was that of a princess (Sita) who was to be given to the one out of seven suitors who could bend a certain bow and shoot an arrow from it".

The princess, according to the author, was an "elderly prima donna, who waved herself about". This was the celebrated Yindaw Ma Lay. Yet in a picture taken a few years later by the Italian photographer Felice Beato, she looked remarkably well preserved, and she continued her stage career into her seventies due to financial necessity. She was the last of the leading court dancers, and in her day, the darling of princes and the undisputed queen of the Burmese operatic stage, a versatile performer who had made the roles of Sita and Phutsapar her very own.

To the foreign dignitaries gathered in the palace that night, it all must have seemed very quaint, but what they could not have known was that they were witnessing the passing of the *nandwin thabinthee* (court dancers) of the Konbaung kings, whose artistry, discipline and dignity had been handed down since 1767 by Siamese captives from Ayutthaya. The troupe of dancers disbanded soon after, never to perform again on "royal ground".

History

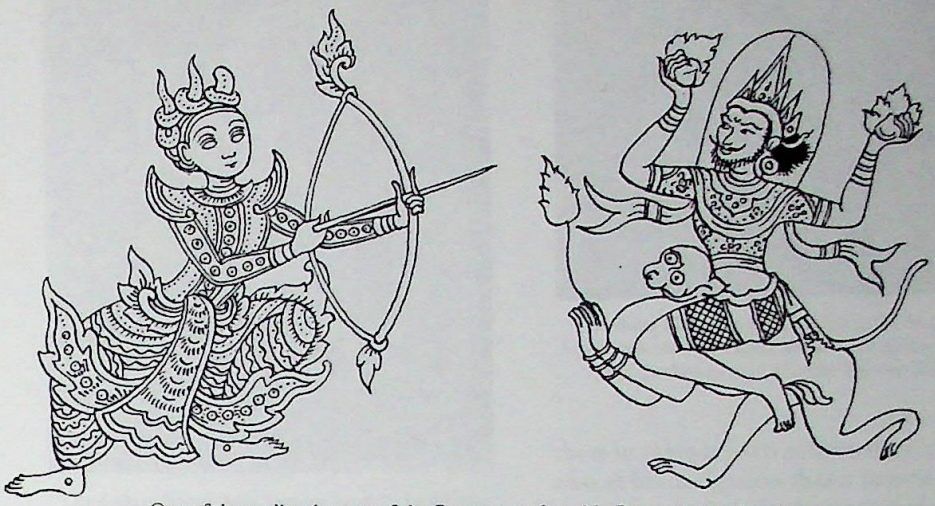
arliest image of Rama in Burma must vandalised stone statue in the eleventh y Nat Hlaung Kyaung Temple at Pa- among the fine tondi of the Abeyadana le, also from that period, can be found lest outline drawing of this deity, riding e back of the faithful monkey-warrior man.

riously, for the next six centuries or so, of art connected with the Ramayana t appear to have been commissioned in a. In literature too, no mention of the prior to the 1770s has so far been found; st, however, have been known to some ars, since religious and secular works neighbouring countries were being lated into the Burmese language well e that period.

1763, Hsinbyushin, one of the war-like of King Alaungphaya, came to the e. Determined to carry on the campaign st Siam which had been interrupted by leath of his father, he collected a vast and in a few years was strong enough to h a full scale invasion. On April 7th, fabulously rich Ayutthaya fell, and ically the whole court, immense trea- and most of the inhabitants who sur- the savagery of his troops were dragged in a nightmare journey to his capital at napura.

e captives included craftsmen, dancers, musicians, who were to enhance to a derable extent the various art forms of conquerors. As time went by, members Siamese royal family found the tedium at the capital unbearable. Nostalgia for native entertainment set in, and as a , the Ramayana was organised and pre- d for the very first time at the Burmese e, with Siamese court players, among some of the fallen aristocracy, perform- traditional dress and dancing to the age hythms of Ayutthaya. Did these nobles muse on what had been perpetrated by ancestors on the inhabitants of Angkor n in 1431: the carrying away of ninety and Cambodians, among whom were s and artisans who were later to embel- he capital of King Boromoraja II with unique talents.

roughout the remaining years of Hsin- hin's reign the Ramayana continued to n at court. So novel was the presenta- that those in authority, encouraged by members of the Siamese nobility, re- any change from the original. To the ese, the elegant and stately gestures of iamese court dancers must have been ating, accustomed as they were to staid nts, the Hawsar (a dramatic narration tory), the Nibhatkhin (plays based on takas and the life of Buddha), the ener- sword and shield dances of the king's rs, and the exuberant movements of folk Nat spirit performers.



One of the earliest images of the Ramayana found in Burma is the drawing (right) of Rama riding Hanuman, from the 11th century Abeyadana Temple. At left, the figure of a court dancer as Laungdaw Yama Min (Rama) from a lacquer box dating to the reign of Sagaing Min (1819–1837)

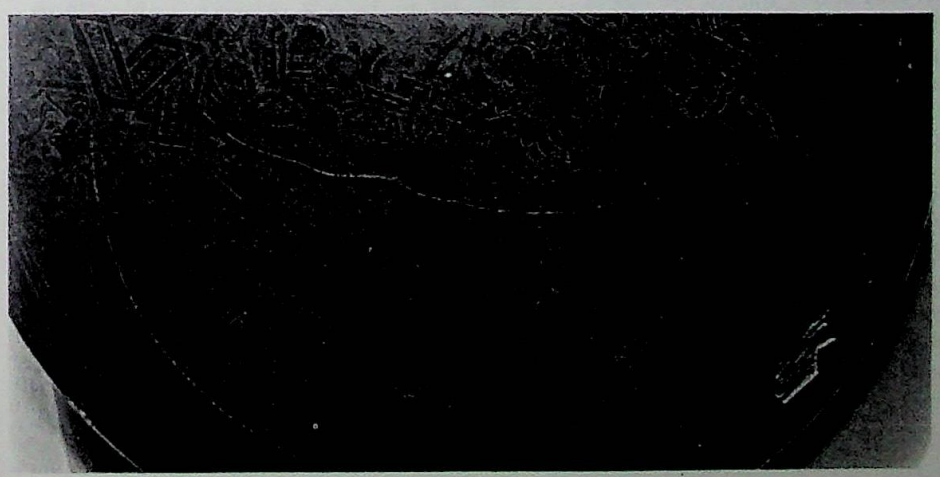
Yadanapura, it is unfortunate that no pictorial representation or artefact attributable to the Ramayana has survived from this period. Some researchers may also find it strange that although the murals in the Ananda Monastery (1775) at Pagan, painted at the height of the court's infatuation with the story, contain scenes from contemporary palace life, including theatrical performances, they do not so much as hint at the existence of this dance drama.

It was not until the second half of Badon Min's reign (1783–1819), when enthusiasm for dramatic performances had gathered momentum, that the general public became aware of this new form of entertainment. Senior civil servants scattered throughout the kingdom also helped to spread its popularity by arranging for travelling companies from the capital to stage the drama, on which occasions everyone was welcome to see the performers.

Europeans who were in Burma during the last quarter of the eighteenth century observed the tradition of horn or ivory sword handles being carved in the shape of Hanuman. The figure was believed to bring strength and protection to its owner. We know that this trend continued well into the nineteenth century as numerous specimens have now come to light. However, as the Ramayana became known to a wider audience, lacquer workers, woodcarvers and other craftsmen, eager for new themes, began to incorporate the rich assortment of characters from the epic into their work.

In London, several large lacquer betel-nut boxes, decorated with contemporary scenes showing members of the royal family watching a performance of the Ramayana, have recently come to light. Some of these receptacles also depict selected episodes from the story; although undated, they can be identified by comparing the design of architecture, costumes and hair styles in them with murals dating from the early part of the reign of Sagaing Min (1819–1837). Until illustrations which can be dated with certainty to a period before 1819 can be found, the scenes from these boxes will have to be accepted as the earliest surviving works associated with the Burmese version of the Ramayana.

At the Maha Lawkamayazein Pagoda, which was built between 1847 and 1849 by the Maung Htaung Sayadaw, Patriarch of Burma, there are over three hundred engraved alabaster plaques devoted entirely to the epic. These unique and beautifully executed pieces have now been collected by the



The cover of a lacquer betel-nut box from 1800–1850 shows Sagaing Min

A rubbing from an alabaster plaque in the Maha Lawkamayazein Pagoda, dated 1847–1849, shows Datthageri in his flying chariot

Laungdaw Yama Min and his brother Letkhana (Lakshmana) appear in this alabaster rubbing from the Maha Lawkamayazein Pagoda

A third alabaster rubbing from the Maha Lawkamayazein Pagoda shows Laungdaw Yama Min, Letkhana and Theeda Daywe (Sita)

Department of Archaeology and are housed in a specially constructed museum at Phayargyi village, near Monywa.

The third example which falls in chronological order is contained within a *parabaik* (folding book) in the British Library (OR 14178). It appears to have been based on an older manuscript, since the textile designs, crowns and costumes of the principal characters suggest a period of about 1840; however, the hair styles and the *ahcheik* patterns on the *htamein* skirts of the palace ladies, together with the multi-roofed gateways of the palace cities, indicate that it was painted sometime after 1857.

Photographs of wooden monasteries taken from the 1850s onwards show many of the buildings decorated with carvings from the Ramayana, but the epic's popularity with the woodcarvers slowly came to an end with the passing of that century.

King Hsinbyushin was succeeded by the youthful Singu Min (1776–1781), during whose reign the outwardly cultured and elegant atmosphere continued at the Burmese court. Many Burmese call the years between 1770 and 1824 the age of translation, so keen were the courtiers, clergy and scholars to obtain knowledge from foreign sources. It was also during this period that the poet U Toe wrote the *Yama Yagan*, a richly woven tapestry of verse, describing in pure Burmese the story of the Ramayana.

The Chief Queen of Singu Min, Thakin Min Mi, was an accomplished poet and writer who encouraged the performance of the Ramayana, which was now called the Yama Zatdaw. But she introduced to it new Burmese songs and music, some of them composed by herself, to replace the Siamese originals, whose novelty was beginning to fade.

It is to be assumed that the gradual change in the costumes of the dancers from Siamese to native design began from this period. One suspects that it started with the actress playing Theeda Daywe, or Princess Sita, who would have worn the Siamese *panung*, a length of material tied at the waist, with one end passed between the legs and tucked up at the back. Thakin Min Mi and her ladies, dressed in their long-sleeved jackets and htamein, which covered the legs and trailed behind them as they walked, thought the panung quite unladylike and not in keeping with the dignity of the palace.

The adventures of Laungdaw Yama Min (Rama) continued to fascinate, taking a staggering forty-five nights to perform. It was said that on some nights, the action consisted entirely of scenes depicting the wars between the demons and the monkeys, which were understandably not popular with the ladies.

On occasion, Singu Min, befuddled with toddy wine, would slip out of the royal box armed with his sword, and donning either a demon or a monkey mask, would join in with the players, much to the embarrassment of some of the queens and ministers. Sadly, the gloriously carefree and exhilarating days were numbered for these young royals. Singu Min's uncle, the formidable U Waing, later known as Badon Min or Bodawphara, "lurked in the wings", and when the opportunity presented itself, swooped down like the demon king of Lanka, snuffing out the lives of his nephews.

A court record of the time hints darkly that Thakin Min Mi, who had done so much for the Yama Zatdaw, was, together with her younger sister, the Queen of the Central Palace, handed over to the tender mercies of the sinister Mair Talaing, mother of the late Queen of the Northern Palace who had earlier been ceremonially drowned by royal decree, due no doubt to the intrigues of the two sisters.

Badon Min (1782–1819) erupted into the political arena with a vengeance. Extremely able and ruthless, he soon made Burma a strong military power, but left the management of the arts entirely in the capable hands of his son, the Ein Shay Thakin or Crown Prince. Although a great soldier when campaigning, the Prince nevertheless had a gentler side. A man of culture, he collected the best craftsmen in the country and settled them in various parts of the palace city. It was also at his instigation that a fact-finding mission composed of eight eminent scholars was dispatched to Cambodia, Laos, Pashu (probably Java) and Siam, where it collected information on the dance, drama and music of these countries.

In 1789, the valuable material gathered during that mission, together with further data on the Ramayana, was translated into Burmese with the help of scholars at court. Fifty-four of these methodically classified volumes on paper parabaik, which so enriched the indigenous dance and drama, have survived, and they are now in the University Library at Mandalay. Included among these works are some of the songs composed by Singu Min's unfortunate Chief Queen for the Yama Zatdaw.

Michael Symes, who headed an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava in 1795, was probably the first Englishman to have witnessed a performance of the Burmese version of the Ramayana at the residence of the Crown Prince. He states in his account that the best dancers and actors of the day were said to be of Siamese origin.

The Crown Prince died before his father and so, on the death of the King, his grandson, Sagaing Min (1819–1837) came to the throne. A man with an easygoing nature, he was musically minded and "fond of shows and theatrical exhibitions". Many of the lacquer betel-nut boxes decorated with scenes from the Ramayana which have survived date from his reign.

It was during this period that U Khin, the Thabin Woon or Minister for Dance and Drama, compiled a long list of rules to be observed by the royal troupe of dancers, singers and puppeteers. He was given extensive powers as a judge to hand out punishments to the entertainers, who did not come under the normal jurisdiction of the law courts.

Playwrights who offended either royalty or the clergy had their "hands punished", presumably cut off. For actors and singers, it was the offending tongue that was removed. One suspects that the mere threat, which the Minister was quite capable of carrying out, was sufficient to keep everyone on their best

there were in 1821 seventeen dancers ten musicians employed at the palace.

The Yama Zatdaw continued to be per-ned but it now had a rival in the Aindar-ntha, or Enaung Zat ("Romance of Prince aung"), a Siamese play that had been slated by the prolific writer and composer awaddi Mingyi U Sa in 1785. During the n of Konbaung Min (1837–1846) and his Pagan Min (1847–1853) the Yama daw regained its popularity and became nly established as part of traditional court ertainment. However, unsettled conditions hin the kingdom, coupled with the mental ss suffered by these two monarchs, did provide an appropriate atmosphere for flourishing of theatrical arts.

In the reign of Mindon (1853–1878) the ma Zatdaw suffered a gradual decline and rarely performed in its entirety, with only urite episodes being presented to please court. This was in part due to the mon-h, who was religious by nature and frown-on the frivolity of the theatre. Marionette ws, which he thought were more decorous, ned supreme within the palace.

The earliest reference to the stringed pup-can be found in a poem composed by the k Shin Ratthasara in 1484. However, by nineteenth century this art form had been ned, and since it had acquired considerable l favour by then, courtiers would often art unpleasant information to their sover-through the medium of the marionettes. rge Scott, in *The Burman*, enthused about elocutionary powers of the performers nd the curtain, the verve and passion of songs, the accuracy and melody of the tative", and the skill with which the pup-were manipulated.

Occasionally Mindon would relent, and the t outstanding dancers of his reign would orm before him. Extremely talented male cers were awarded the coveted title of nnyarthe Saryae; one title holder, Maung Mya, became head of the Yama Zatdaw pe, and as such, played the principal part many years. His wife, the attractive and ple Mair Hnin Khet, took the role of eda Daywe. Great decorum had to be rved by the players at court. "How could sit at a play with one's wife and daugh-", said a Burmese official to Major Arthur yre in 1855, "were anything improper ibited."

In 1877, to mark the celebrations proclaim-Queen Victoria as Empress of India, ndon sent down to British Burma his own l troupe of dancers to perform the Yama daw. An English observer noted that ything, from the costumes to the musical ruments, was of a quality never before in Rangoon. Among the performers was premier dancer and singer, Yindaw Ma , who played the role of Theeda Daywe. owever, on their return to the capital, ale among some members of the troupe me low due to the unstable political situ-at court. In 1878, Saya Hmun, one of ading players, decided to leave Manda-lay, and taking some of his colleagues, travelled down to British Burma where he founded a new Yama troupe at Phyarpone. Not being able to afford the complicated stage props used at the palace, they had to dance on the bare earth without any scenery, making do as best they could. The Phyarpone Yama troupe still performs to this day, using the original masks worn by their predecessors at Mandalay.

On the death of Mindon, Theebaw (1878–1885) became King, and together with Suphayarlat, his aggressively assertive Queen, "turned the court upside down". They were both very young, politically naive and totally overwhelmed by the dazzling power that was suddenly thrust upon them. Firmly insulated within their gilded palace from the outside world, they indulged in a round of theatricals and impressive court ceremonies.

In a parabaik painted during the closing years of Theebaw's reign, which is now in the Chester Beatty Collection in Dublin (ref. 1277), can be seen members of the Mandalay court enjoying a performance of the Ramayana within the palace gardens. The action takes place before a small temporary theatre in which are seated Theebaw, Suphayarlat and their eldest daughter. Flanked by the Orchestras of the Royal Left and Right, a large troupe of court dancers act out the battle of Lanka on the open ground. A decorated shrine in which are arranged the principal masks from this drama can also be seen behind them.

By 1884 the number of performers taking part in the Yama Zatdaw had increased to ninety-one, and each of them was given a plot of paddy land, which they worked or hired out according to their fancy. It is said that at the Annexation of Upper Burma the following year, some of the male members of the troupe became so incensed at the surrender of Theebaw to the British that they planned to rescue their sovereign, but on finding the opposition too strong, had to stand by helplessly, many weeping openly. Their descendants still live in Mandalay in their own quarter called the Yodaya Zay (Ayutthaya Bazaar), which has a shrine dedicated to Phra Ram.

Top, a photograph taken by Peter Kleir in Rangoon in 1877 (detail below) shows celebrations proclaiming Queen Victoria as Empress of India. The structure shown is the temporary theatre where royal dancers from Mandalay probably performed the Yama Zatdaw. [illegible]

The actress Ma Aye Sein in a Yodaya style costume of a prince (mintha) similar to what the actor playing Laungdaw Yama Min would have worn. Circa 1890

The court dancer Ma Htway Lay was famous for her portrayal of the kinnari princess, Dway Mair Naw, in the play Ngwe Taung, or "Silver Hill". Circa 1890

A painting on silk shows an informal performance of the Yama Zatdaw (without masks) on the palace grounds, the orchestra at left. The principals shown are, from left, Letkhana, Theeda Daywe and Laungdaw Yama Min. Circa 1880. Private collection

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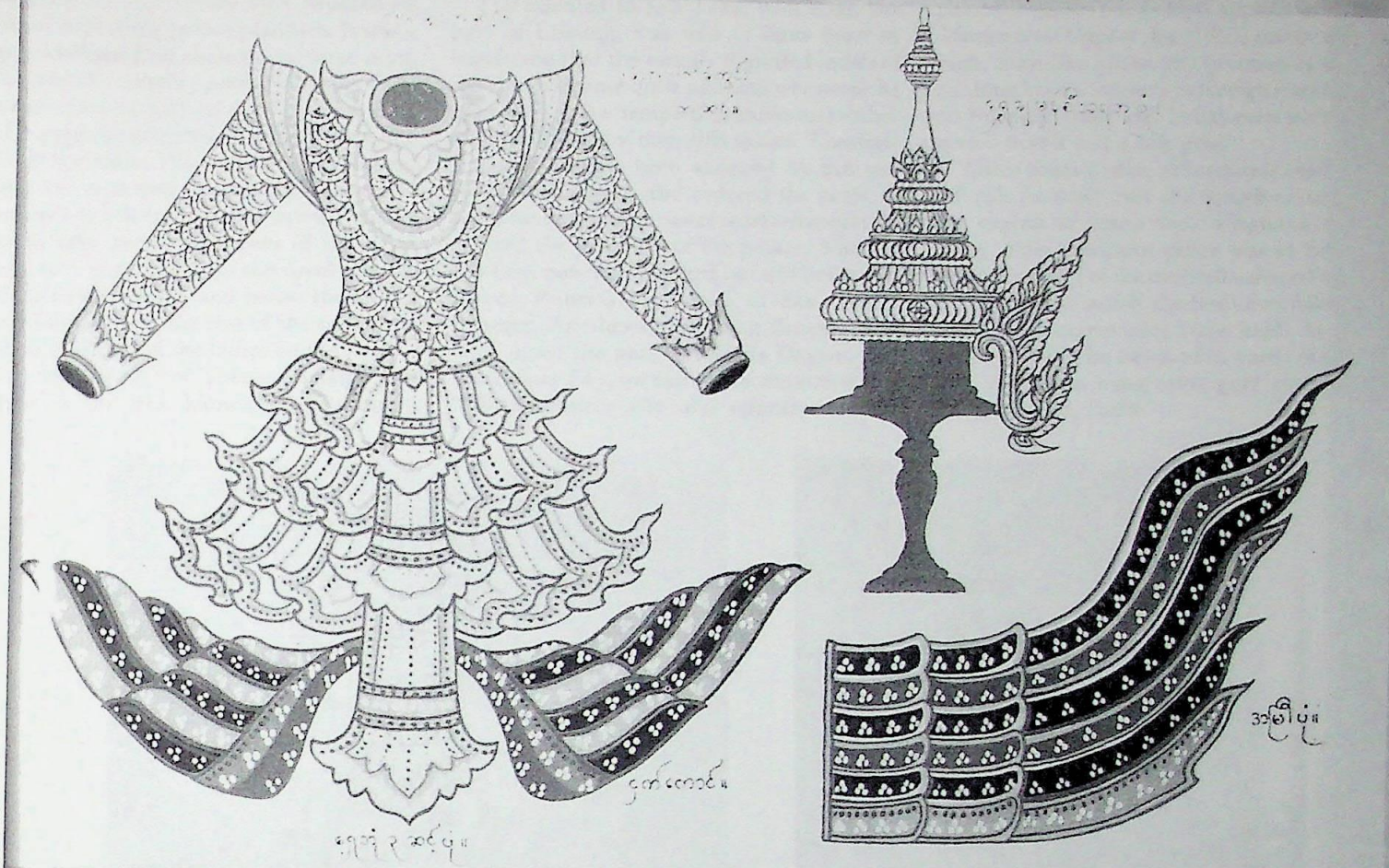
court, as was the Aindarwuntha or Enaung

Situated on the north side of the main



A costume design for a kinnari dancer at the Burmese court, copied by the author from a 19th century parabaik (folding book) painting

A costume design for a kinnari dancer at the Burmese court, copied by the author from a 19th century parabaik (folding book) painting

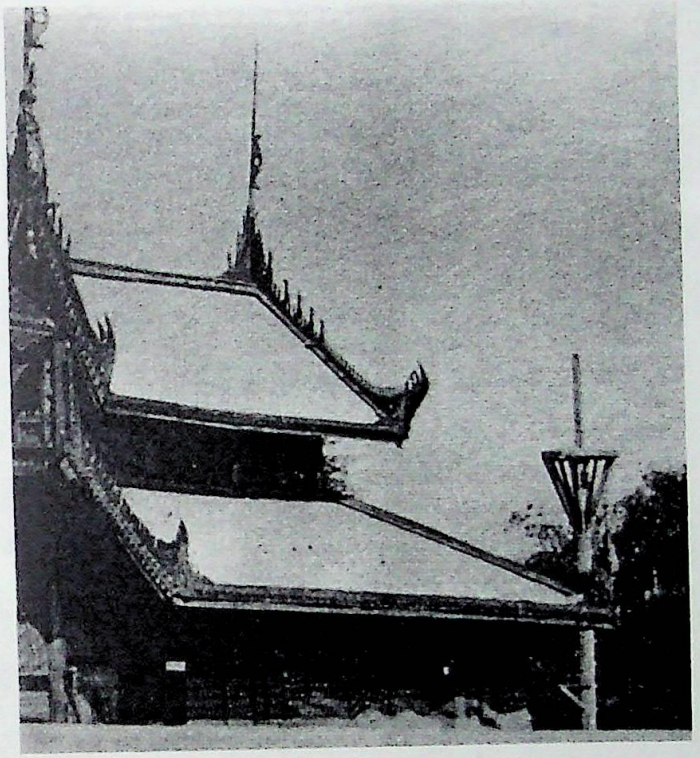
During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Pwekyisaung, or Royal Theatre, was built near the apartments occupied by the Queen Mother, which were situated on the south side of the palace platform. It was a large gilded pavilion enclosed on three sides, with a railed veranda opening onto the fifty-feet wide dance area below, over which towered a huge circular structure of either white cloth or fine mats. This was not a permanent fixture and was only constructed when performances or celebrations of a private nature were to take place. Members of the royal family took their places in the royal box according to their rank, and below them on a raised platform sat the rest of the court, the men on the left and the ladies on the right.

Toward the end of Theebaw's reign two temporary theatres, known as the Eastern court, as was the Aindarwuntha or Enaung Zat, which played to an enraptured audience of palace ladies.

The talented U San Toke, who acted the part of Enaung, was said to have been so handsome that the usually dignified ladies of the court became quite agitated whenever he appeared, and attempted to outdo each other in the lavishness of their gifts to him. Theebaw was said to have been annoyed by this unseemly behaviour, and ordered the actor to cover his face with a gauze scarf whenever he entered the precincts of the palace. Yindaw Ma Lay, now middle-aged but still beautiful, played Princess Phutsapar to San Toke's Enaung. Another outstanding dancer, who often acted the part of Theeda Daywe, was Ma Htway Lay, an extremely attractive and brilliant dancer who also appeared as the

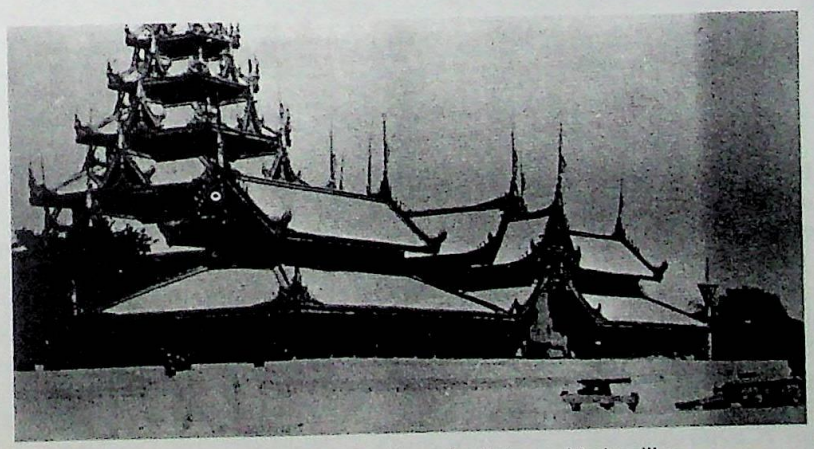
Situated on the north side of the main hall of audience was an area reserved for use as a theatre on gala occasions. In a picture of the palace at Amarapura which appears in Yule's *Mission to the Court of Ava* (1855) can be seen a high, mast-like pillar, the function of which has long been a mystery to foreign researchers on Burmese court life. It has even been suggested that it was a flag pole.

Three times a year, subordinate chiefs and officials from all over the kingdom came to the capital to renew their allegiance to the King. This enormous pillar was in fact the central support of the umbrella-shaped roof of the theatre at which the festivities following the formal ceremonies were held. At such times it would be swathed in yards of velvet and the edges hung with gold cloth from Murshidabad, India.



On the right is the pillar at the side of the Audience Hall of the Mandalay Palace, which supported the umbrella-shaped temporary theatre where the Yama Zatdaw was often performed

The Pwekyisaung, or Royal Theatre, built in the first half of the 19th century on the south side of the Mandalay Palace platform



The Audience Hall at the Mandalay Palace, with the pillar support for the temporary theatre at the far right

Dance Area

As a raised platform or stage was never used, dance and drama were always performed on the ground, which was a space about fifty feet square. It was unthinkable that the players should be allowed to occupy an area which was on a higher level than that of their "betters", among whom would have been high ranking officials and people of a venerable age.

As there were no dressing rooms for the performers to make up and change into their costumes, they expertly and modestly accomplished this with the eyes of the court upon them. "Actors and beggars, eaters of food

U San Toke, whose most famous role was Prince Enaung. Photograph circa 1880

Two prints from *The Graphic* (the first dated January 4th, 1879) show "Burmese Actors". At the top are U San Toke as the Indian Prince Enaung and Yindaw Ma Lay as Princess Phutsapar in Aindarwuntha, a play which came to rival the Yama Zatdaw in popularity at the court

Yindaw Ma Lay, the dancer and singer who often played Theeda Daywe and Princess Phutsapar, photographed in middle age by Felice Beato, 1889

thrown away", has always been a common ...ssion throughout the country. Despite ... the performers were treated reasonably ... Food from the royal kitchens, wrapped ...rge fresh leaves, was given to them before ...rformance. Some of the more talented ...rs and playwrights were rewarded with ...ges silken clothes and jewellery.

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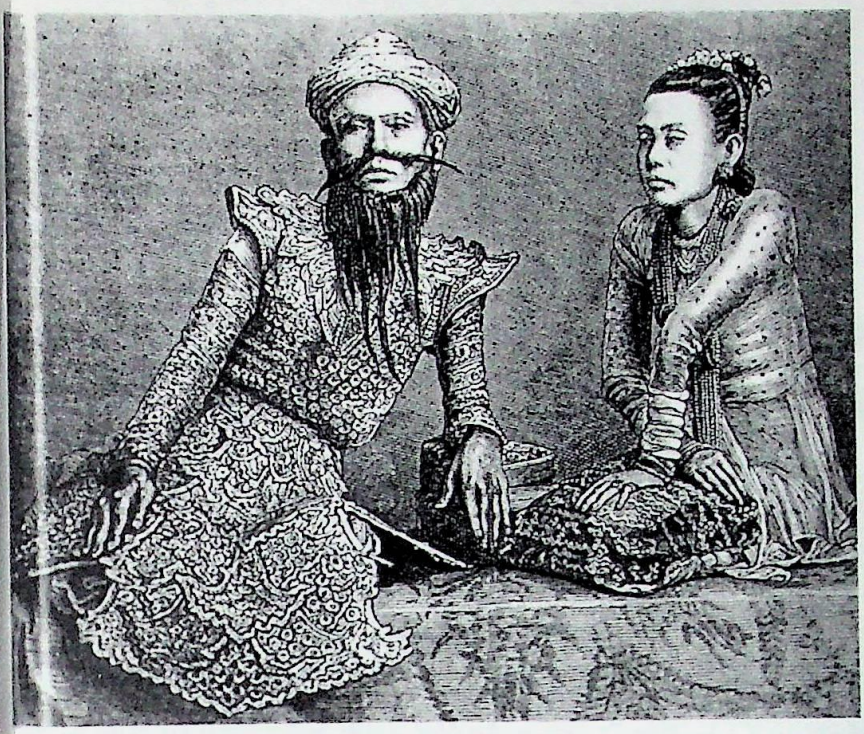
bad lighting, as facial expressions could not have been easily visible from a distance; this would most certainly have applied to those who wore a mask throughout the performance.

A long lacquered pole suspended horizontally between two posts at the back of the orchestra was used as a rack for hanging the many types of masks worn by the characters. Props were few in the early days. A storage chest became either a throne or a rock, "changing" into whatever object the actors wished it to become through the eloquence of their words, or by the orchestra playing a ...

ry, there were three orchestras at the court, known as the Orchestras of the Inner Palace and composed of 144 musicians. Royal patronage gave each orchestra leader the right to have four gilded *thaings* or wands inserted into the sides of his circular instrument of drums, which were decorated with glass mosaics and gilding. And for the first time, an increasing number of elaborate stage props began to be used.

After the Annexation of Upper Burma in 1885, the royal troupe of Yama Zatdaw dancers gradually dispersed, some to seek employment at the courts of wealthy Shan ...



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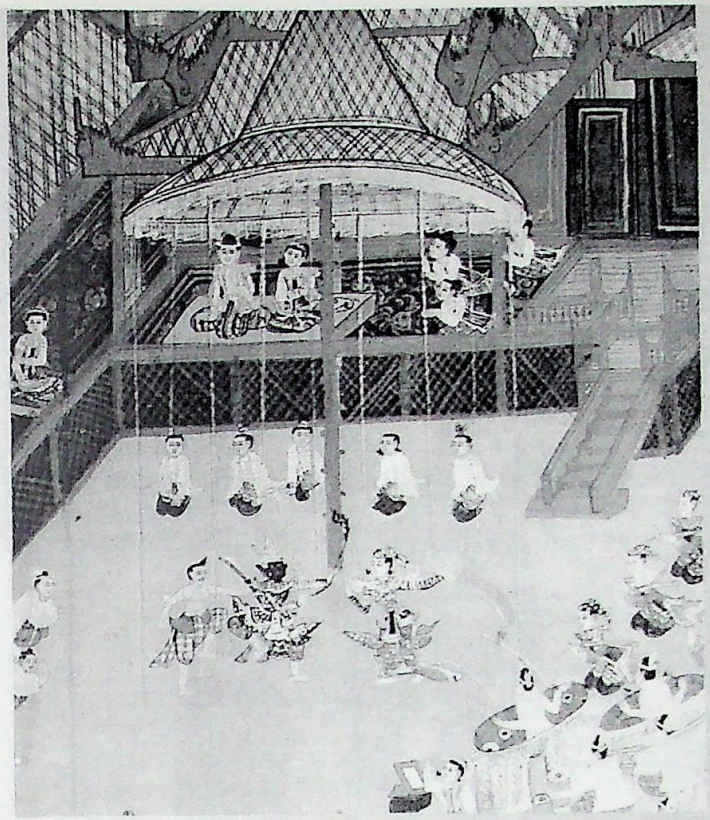


A parabaik painting from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum shows Kipg Theebaw and Queen Suphayarlat watching a performance of the Yama Zatdaw in a temporary theatre at the summer palace. Circa 1880

Detail from the silk painting at the top of the following page shows Laungdaw Yama Min and his brother Letkhana

A silk painting, circa 1880, of a Yama Zatdaw performance in the palace gardens at Mandalay, shows Laungdaw Yama Min shooting an arrow at the monkey Bali

A silk painting of a performance of the Yama Zatdaw in the Mandalay palace gardens, circa 1880, includes depictions of Letkhana, Laungdaw Yama Min and Hanuman

Manipuri dancers perform for Prince Albert Victor in the palace grounds at Mandalay in December 1889. Photograph from a private collection

Kyaungtha Yama (The Student R

Also performing for Prince Albert Victor in December 1889 were these young daughters of Mandalay society. Photograph from a private collection

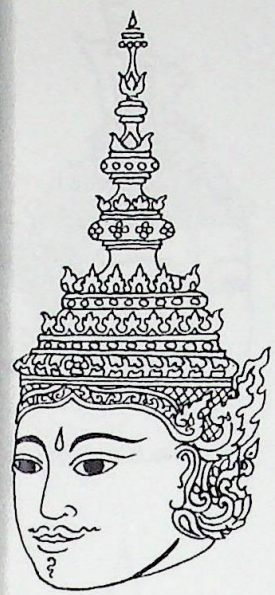
The Demon King Datthageri (Ra

brash, it wanted new songs and a livelier form of dancing. Although the Yama Zatdaw was now performed on a stage, the stately and measured movements were too slow and sedate for the young audience.

The years before the Second World War almost sounded the death knell of this once popular dance drama, but after Independence in 1948, there was a revival, and in the 1970s, thirteen troupes were known to be performing regularly, mainly in Lower Burma.

At Yodaya Zay in Mandalay, the descendants of the captives from Ayutthaya occasionally bring to life the Ramakien, the Ramayana version of the Kings of Siam. The large groups of Manipuris whose forefathers had been brought back to Burma as prisoners in the 1770s also live in their own quarter at Bodhigone and at the former capital of Amarapura. They too can boast of having provided a royal troupe of dancers for the Burmese court. To this day, they have maintained their own way of life and culture, guarding jealously the purity of their particular presentation of this epic from Burmese innovations. In their version of the Ramayana the role of Sita is always played by a man, not in an effeminate way, but with restraint and dignity.

A scene from a 1959 performance of the Yama Zatdaw shows, from left, the Golden Deer, Laungdaw Yama Min, Theeda Daywe and Letkhana



Nandaw Yama (The Palace Rama)

The Monkey Na La

The Monkey Ingata

The Monkey Satkuman

The Demon Etkhayakhunmar

A Demon Soldier

The Demon Kontaseitta

The Demon Maryitsa

MASKS FROM THE BURMESE YAMA ZATDAW (RAMAYANA), BASED ON DRAWINGS BY SAYA SAING AND U SHWE TAUNG

Masks

It must be assumed that the original masks of the Yama Zatdaw were designed and made by some of the captive Siamese dancers after their arrival in Burma, as all their costumes and stage accessories must have been left behind or destroyed at Ayutthaya in 1767. No masks have survived from the reign of Hsinbyushin and one can only make tentative suggestions as to the materials used in their construction.

The base could have been of either thin bamboo work or cloth covered with *thayo* lacquer (a mixture of sawdust, ash and lacquer), with the same material used to mould the facial details. Masks carved from light wood probably existed, but these may have been too heavy for some of the dancers. The earliest masks to have survived (circa 1878), which are still being used by members of the Myarpone Yama troupe, were constructed of papier maché and lacquer. Once the features

Only three sets of designs showing the masks worn by the Yama Zatdaw dancers are known to exist. The first (ref.1201, the Chester Beatty Collection), which is the handiwork of a Siamese artist, is datable to about 1850. The second is by the artist Saya Saing, and the third, by the sculptor U Shwe Taung; the last two, which are in Burma, are believed to have been copied from parabaik paintings from the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Although there was a variety of masks representing animal, demon or human characters, the basic facial structure consisted of only two distinct types. One was the "An Kite" (the mask with its mouth closed) and the other, the "An Ha" (with its mouth open). The former was used by minor characters whose roles required them only to attend on the principals or dance in the chorus. Actors who had lines to speak wore the latter type, and would often tilt their masks back for better delivery of the dialogue.

However, the actor playing the major part of Laungdaw Yama Min also followed this masks. One is the "Kyaungtha" (student) and the other, the "Nandaw" (palace), which is placed ceremonially over his head at his marriage to Theeda Daywe. Although the faces are similar, each mask has a distinctive pagoda-like crown.

There were two types of Ramayana performed at court. In the Pondaw Yama, masks were worn, as dance and mime predominated. In the other, known simply as Yama Zatdaw, where long passages of verse were sung, Yama and his brother Letkhana appeared with their faces uncovered.

Members of the Yama Zatdaw troupe were divided into two groups: those who played the parts of monkeys and other beings associated with the benevolent Laungdaw Yama Min, and those who played the demons, who were the followers of Datthageri (Ravana). To this day, each group still keeps to its own side of the stage. The masks are also kept segregated, arranged on long shelves with flowers and offerings placed before them. Over the years, a plethora of taboos and

Letkhana (Lakshmana)

The Hermit Bodaw

Theeda Daywe (Sita)

Hanuman

Garuda

The Demoness Thanpanakha (Surpanakha)

A Demon General

A Demon General

MASKS FROM THE BURMESE YAMA ZATDAW (RAMAYANA), BASED ON DRAWINGS BY SAYA SAING AND U SHWE TAUNG

Costumes

Dancing and singing always featured prominently at the Burmese court, with descriptions of gala occasions recorded in stone inscriptions from as early as the eleventh century.

Wall paintings in most of the temples of Pagan contain scenes of fancifully dressed dancers taking part in a celebration. The huge Rajamanicula monolith of 1649, housed within the sacred precincts of the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda at Sagaing, describes in detail the elaborate costumes and jewellery worn by the kinnari dancers at the court of Thalun Min.

It is on record that by the 1770s, Burma was importing silks, velvet, satin and large quantities of needles and thread from China via Yunnan. Other rich materials were also being brought in by merchants from India, together with imitation gold and silver sequins. Burmese, Indian and Shan tailors were employed at the palace turning out a variety of court and theatrical costumes of flamboyant design. Some of the robes were so weighted down with flame-like appendages, held up from within by small pieces of cane, that movement would seem almost impossible.

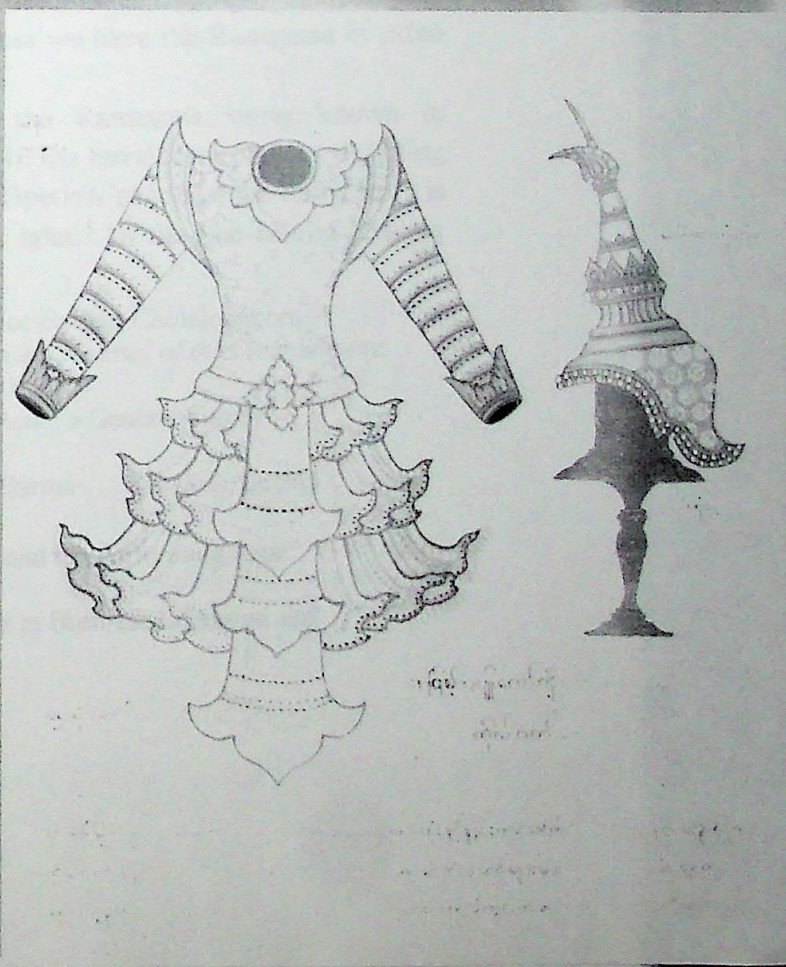
In the second half of the nineteenth century, the costumes of the court dancers became even more colourful and elaborate as new materials were introduced from the West. Heavily embroidered and sequin-encrusted ornamental pieces, called "bone", were fastened at the waist and descended in three leaf-like layers to just below the knees, with the ends curling up and giving the illusion that the dancer was floating effortlessly.

As the performers moved, casting huge shadows on the white umbrella ceiling, their costumes sparkling with a million points of light thrown out by the yellow glare of the spluttering oil lamps, it is easy to see why the courtiers sat, night after night, spellbound by the adventures of Laungdaw Yama Min.

A Demon Soldier

A Demon Soldier

Monkeys and demons from the Yama Zatdaw (Ramayana) in a painting by the author



The Ramayana Drama in Myanmar*

The story of Rama first reached Myanmar as it did to several Southeast Asian countries with the early Indian traders and merchants, some of whom settled down to form Hindu communities[1]. The early Pyu people worshipped some Hindu deities; one of their earlirt cities was called Beikthano or Vishnu City, which flourished from about the 1st to 8th century AD. Near this city is Taungdwin - gyi, supposed to have been founded in 837 AD, with the classical name of Ramavati (the city of Rama).[2] Rama is worshipped by the Hindus as an avatar or incarnation of Vishnu, so the story of Rama might have been known to the Pyu people, though there is as yet no concrete proof.

The oral narration of the Rama story, or the Ramayana, preceded the visual depictions, which in turn were followed by literary renditions in prose and poetry and later by dramatic performances. In some periods these four aspects of the Ramayana tradition co-existed, over-lapping , intermingling and influencing each other.[3] In modern times we have the Ramayana in video and movies.

The first pictorial evidence of the Ramayana being known in Myanmar is from the early Bagan Period. In the terra-cotta plaques depicting the 550 (or rather 547) Jatakas of the two Hpetleik pagodas, the Rama story is shown as incorporated into the Buddhist tales.[4] In the Nat-hlaung Kyaung

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*Revised version of a paper read at the Siam Society and Chulalongkorn University. July 1998. 1st published in the *Journal of the Siam Society*. Vol. 90, pts. 1 and 2 (2002) p. 137-148.

1. Sarkar, H.B." The Ramayana in Southeast Asia : a General Survey" . . . 1983. p 207.
2. Ray, Nihar - ranjan. *Brahmanical Gods in* Burma ..... Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2001 (reprint). p.8.
3. Suresh Awasthi. "The Ramayana Tradition and the Performing Arts." 1980. p.661.
4. Thein Han, U and U Khin Zaw. " Ramayana in Burmese Literature and Arts." . . .1976. p. 137..

(Vishnu Temple) of the 11th century in Bagan, there are two brick and stone sculptures of Rama and Parasu Rama.[1]

In a lovely tondi of the Abeyadana Temple of King Kyansittha's period (A.D. 1084-1113) a figure of Rama riding Hanuman can be seen.[2] We can, therefore, safely say that the Ramayana was known to the Myanmar people by the 11th century if not earlier. King Kyansittha himself claimed descent from Vishnu and asserted that he was a close relative of Rama in his pervious existence, in two of his Mon inscriptions, one from Mya Kan, Bagan the other from the Kyaik Thalan Pagoda near Thaton[3].

The Rama story is known in three forms to the Myanmar -

(1) Rama as an Avatar, an incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. In old Bagan the Varshnava Brahmans played an important role in court ceremonies, even as they did in later Myanmar kings' times right up to the annexation of the Myanmar Kingdom in 1886. These Brahmans worshipped Rama; one can still see Rama as a Hindu deity being worshipped by the Hindus in the Ponna-zu quarter of Mandalay up to the present day. The Myanmar call this "original" Rama, (Vishnu) Rama or "Pashu Yama (Rama)".[4] This is probably Parasu Rama (also spelt Parashurama).

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1. Luce, G. H. *Old Burma - Early Pagan*. Vol. 1 . . . 1969. p. 222. See plates 149e and 149f.
2. Singer, Noel F. " The Ramayana at the Burmese Court" . . . 1987. p. 91.
3. Thein Han, U . "Shei-Oo Myanmar Yama a -phwint", *Sabei Phyu* (Apr. to Oct. 1986). Reprinted in *Collected Works of Saya Zaw Gyi*. Vol 1. . . . 1993. p. 106.
4. Hla Thamein. *Myanmar Ramayana* . . . 1998 p. 13.

(2) The Rama story as incorporated into the 550 Buddhist Jataka tales, where Rama is depicted as a future Buddha, a Bodhisat. The Myanmar term for this Buddhist Rama is "Alaung-daw Yama (Rama)" or the, Bodhisat Rama. This story is Jataka no. 461, the Dat-thaya-hta (Dasaratha) Jataka.

(3) The third Rama story is that of Valmiki and later recensions. The Myanmars probably received this enlarged version of the Ramayana not only from India, but also from Thailand and Laos from about the 16th century. The Myanmar call this Rama story "Pondaw Yama (Rama)". This version is also known as "Nan-dwin Yama (Rama)", or " The Palace Rama," as this version became the Royal court drama of the Myanmar king's palace.[1]

Literary versions

The various Myanmar literary versions of the Ramayana were meticulously studied in the 1970's by U Thein Han, former Chief Librarian of the University of Rangoon Library and Chairman of the Burma (Myanmar) Historical Commission. He wrote ten articles in Myanmar[2] and two in English[3]; these writings form the basic, indispensable literature and became pioneer studies on the Myanmar Ramayana.

According to U Thein Han, the earliest literary reference to the Ramayana is in a Myanmar *pyo* (Jataka poem) written by Shin Agga Thamadi in 1527 AD entitled *Thuwunna-shan Thahte-khan Pyo*, based on the Suvannasama Jataka. There are also two references to the Ramayana from the first half of the 18th century in the *Exegesis* by the Min Kyaung Sayadaw

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1. Po Sein, U. *Yama thon-myo. Nan-dwin Yama*. Vol. 1. . . 1935. p. nga.
2. Thein Han, U(Zawgyi). *Collected Works of Saya Zaw Gyi*. Vol. 1. . . 1993. p. 85-180.
3. See Rangoon University. Historical Research Dept. *Silver Jubilee Publication* . . . 1982. p. 148-170.

(Presiding Monk) of Taungdwingyi to the *Kandaw Min Kyaung Myint taza*[1] and (2) *Manikhet*, a play by Minister Padetha Yazar[2], based on one of the stories of the *Zinme Pannasa*, the Fifty Jataka Tales of Chiang Mai.

The first Myanmar dated literary work of the Ramayana is the *Yama (Rama) Tha-gyin* by U Aung Phyo, written in 1775 AD at Innwa (Ava), near the end of King Hsinbyushin's reign (1763-1776). U Aung Phyo was a popular reciter of ballads, and he wrote the Ramayana in a poetic form called *tha-gyin* which was used for recitations. He probably roamed the country and recited his ballads including the *Rama Tha-gyin*.[3] U Thein Han thinks that the story of Rama in Myanmar was gradually enlarged in a period of about 600 years from the simple oral tradition of the Bagan Period to the complex story as it was written down by U Aung Phyo.

There is also an undated earlier work in prose called the *RamaVatthu Yama Wuthtu* (Rama vatthu) which U Thein Han considers to be from the 17th century, and therefore, it is probably the earliest Ramayana literary work in Myanmar. The story as given in this prose version is very similar to the poetic work of U Aung Phyo, who himself acknowledged that he used an earlier prose work[4].-

This earliest Ramayana work written on palm-leaf was discovered by researchers of the Burma (Myanmar) Historical Commission around 1972. The author of this paper was able to publish in 1974 an offset facsimile of this rare palm-leaf manuscript as "Palm-leaf and Parabaik (Paper) Manuscript

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1. Kandaw Min Kyaung Sayadaw. *Kandaw Min Kyaung Myittaza* (Myitta- sar written by the Presiding Monk of Kandaw Min Kyaung Royal Monastery). See para.17, p.27-28 of the *Exegesis*. BRS, 1933 ed.
2. Padetha Yazar, Wun-gyi (c1684-1751). *Mani-khet Pyazat*. See Hanthawaddy Press, 1972 ed., p.6.
3. Thein Han, U " The Ramayana in Burma". in Rangoon University. *Historical Research Dept*. Silver Jubilee Publication. . . . 1982. p.149.
4. Thein Han, U. " A-mhar sar (Preface)" to *Yama Wuthtu* . . . 1974. p. 5.

Series, no. 4", while he was serving as the Convenor of the Manuscript Publication Sub-Committee of the Universities Publication Committee.[1]

An enlargement of the *Rama Vatthu*, also in prose, is the *Maha Rama (Yama)*, a work probably written in the late 18th century. A manuscript copy from the British Library was copied by U Tet Tut who also edited it together with Prof. U Maung Maung Gyi. As Publisher of the Burma Research Society I was able to print the *Maha Rama* as "New Research Series no. 12" in 1971.[2] This is the most complete text of the Ramayana published in Myanmar so far.

For many years, the most complete text of the Ramayana written for dramatic performance remained unpublished in paper parabaik and palm-leaf manuscript forms. It was given the title*Thiri Yama* (Rama) by U Thein Han; the author was Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung who probably wrote it in the late 18th or early 19th century. This (verse) drama written in prose and poetry with instructions for the stage and for various types of music to be played and songs to be sung, is available on over 1320 palm-leaf manuscript pages at the Myanmar National Library. About twenty years ago I obtained a copy of this rare unpublished work on 54 fascicules of paper parabaik manuscript from the Mandalay University Library and had it carefully recopied by hand by a competent Myanmar scholar on modern paper. I have now been able to get it published by the Universities Historical Research Centre under the title *Yama (Rama) Pya - zat-taw-gyi* in three volumes with special funding from the Prime Minister's office.

Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission, U Maung Maung Tin's opinion is that this work by Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung, the *Thiri Rama*, or the *Yama Pya-zat-taw-gyi* is the work compiled by the members of the Royal Commission for Translating Thai Stories into Myanmar appointed by the Myanmar Crown Prince in 1789[3]. The author's rank is shown in the

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1. *Rama Vatthu* ... 1974.
2. *Maha Rama Vatthu* ... 1971.
3. Maung Maung Tin, U (M.A.). "Yama Pyazat Taw-gyi . . .1957.p.73

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manuscript as "Tha-nya-thei-asu Sayei" and this rank is given to those who are in charge of the Thai and Myanmar drama troupes at the Myanmar kings' court.[1] The title *Nataka* is derived from the Pali "Natako" meaning a dancer or an acrobat.

U Thein Han on the other hand wrote that there was another work, now probably lost, produced by the Royal Commission, and that Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung used this earlier Ramayana Drama and that the new work that he wrote, i.e. *Thiri Rama*, was "definitely a re-presentation".[2] Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung himself mentioned in the manuscript that he based his work on an earlier work and that he edited and rewrote sentences which were corrupt and inconsistant and made the drama more enjoyable, more delightful to the audience. Anyway, the importance of *Thiri Rama* or the

Yama Pya-zat-taw gyi is that it enables us to know what the dramatic performance was like in the Myanmar king's court.

The Ramayana original texts in Myanmar reached their zenith in early 19th century, developing from the nucleus of Valmiki's text, with influences from Indian vernacular recensions, and as a result of Myanmar's cultural contacts with Thailand (both Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya), Laos, Assam and Manipur and Malaya and Java.[3] The following is a list of Ramayana texts in Myanmar

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1. *Ibid*.p.77.
2. Thein Han, U and U Khin Zaw. "The Ramayana in Burmese Literature and Arts" . . . 1976. p.163.
3. Thein Han. U. "*The Ramayana in Burma*" . . . 1982. p. 152.

Author	Title	Date	Remarks
Prose			
(1) Unknown	*Rama Vatthu*	17th century	Facsimile offset reprint of original palm-leaf mss. Universities Publication Committee, 1974. Earliest text so far found.
(2) Unknown	*Maha Rama Vatthu (Wuthtu)*	Late 18th century or Early 19th century	Published by Burma Research Society, 1971.
(3) Saya Htwe	*Rama Thonmyo Zat-taw-gyi Vatthu Wuthtu* [The three versions of Ramayana]	1904	Published by Taing-lon Zabu Press.

Author	Title	Date	Remarks
Poetry			
(4) U Aung Phyo	*Rama Thagyin*	1775	Being edited for publica-tion. Earliest dated poetic version.
(5) U Toe	*Rama Yagan*	1784	Published by Burma Res-earch Society, 1933 in 2v.
(6) Saya Htun (of Akyab)	*Alaung-daw Rama Thagyin*	1905	Published. 3rd ed. 204 p. From Sittway, Rakhine State.

Author	Title	Date	Remarks
Drama			
) Nemyo Nataka Kyaw Gaung	*Rama Pya-zat-taw-gyi (Thiri Yama)*	Late 18th cent. or early 19th cent.	This has the fullest text. Vol. 1 published 2001, vols 2 & 3 published 2002, all three by the Universities Historical Researsh Centre.
3) Saya Ku	*Pon-daw Rama* Pt. 1	1880	Published. Incomplete.
9)U Maung Gyi (Dabein)	*Pontaw Rama and Lakkhana*, Pt. 1	1910	Published. Incomplete.

.b. The above list is based on a list first compiled by U Thein Han in his rticle "Ramayana in Burmese Literature and Arts", *JBRS*, vol. 59, pts. I & II Dec. 1976) p. 138. All publications listed were printed in Yangon.

Author	Title	Date	Remarks
Poetry			
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Between 1968 and 1972 the All Burma Hindu National Central Council published a direct translation from Sanskrit into Myanmar, in six volumes of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The translation was made by the Myanmar monk Shin Kaitima, the Migadawun Sayadaw of Benares.

Also there are a number of retold Ramayana stories in condensed form published in the last fifty-five years.

Dramatic Performance

Although music, song and dancing has been a part of Myanmar culture from the Pyu period, i.e. from the early years of the Christian era, court drama developed quite late, only in the late 18th century during the Konbaung Period. This court drama with dialogue, poetic recitations and music, song and dancing, started with the introduction of the Ramayana dramatic performance by Thai artistes who were brought back after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. A large number of captives were brought back including dancers and musicians who gave an impetus for a renaissance of Myanmar culture[1]. The Thai dancers and musicians were later formed into the Yodaya (Ayutthaya or Thai) Zat-taw-gyi dance and drama troupe and there were 91 artistes at the time of King Thibaw[2] just before Mandalay fell to the invading British forces in November 1885.

It is said that the dancers and musicians at first performed to entertain their own Thai people living in Myanmar. Songs were sung in Thai by the people who longed for their homeland. The Myanmar courtiers who heard the music and songs asked their help to incorporate these into Myanmar classical music repertoire.

Former Rector of the University of Rangoon (Yangon) Dr. Htin Aung in his pioneer study of Burmese (Myanmar) drama wrote that though the Thai

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1. Htin Aung, Dr. *A History of Burma*....1937. p. 175.
2. *Shwe Nanthon Worhara Abidan*. Vol. 1, pt. 174. "Yodaya Zat-taw-gyi Ahmudan" ... 1975.

Ramayana had many characteristics of a proper play, it was more akin to the Elizabethan English masque where the actors and actresses wore gorgeous dresses. He stated that "though the majority of the performers were professionals, many lords and ladies probably took part often, for at the Burmese court exiled members of the Siamese nobility took part in the earlier presentations of the play, but it may be that they had to do so as teachers of the new art of court dramatic performance. Music and song were essentially connected with the play, and all the characters danced."[1]

The Thais taught the Myanmar to perform the Ramayana as a great dramatic art. Dr. Htin Aung wrote that "exiled members of the court were ready and willing to help not only because they were anxious to teach the new art to their conquerors, but also because they missed an entertainment to which they had been accustomed for generations".[2]

The Thai Ramayana or as the Myanmar called it Yodaya (Ayutthaya) Yama (Rama) became immensely popular at the court of the Myanmar kings because the Thais and the Myanmars shared many common cultural characteristics. The Myanmar Court language, customs and manners were similar to those of the Ayutthaya Royal Court and the court scenes of the Ramayana were easily adapted from Thai into Myanmar. Both in Myanmar and Thailand, the Ramayana is also a Jataka story, the hero and heroine are figures of moral uprightness fighting against cruel demons, the maleficence of the world and eventually triumphing. The mythology was common to both nations, so the play could easily be reproduced inserting Myanmar dialogue and songs in place of Thai[3].

The Myanmar were already familiar with the Ramayana in prose and poetry, and therefore, the dramatic performance introduced by the Thai actors and actresses became very popular not only at the Royal Court, but also in courts of the provincial governors like the one in Bago (Pegu) Hanthawadi.

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1. Htin Aung, Dr. *Burmese Drama*. . . . 1937. p.41.
2. *Ibid.* p.42.
3. Htin Aung. Dr. *Burmese Drama* . . . 1937. p.42.

We have an eye-witness account by the British Envoy Michael Symes of such a performance at the residence of the Hanthawadi Myowun, or Governor of the HanthawadiMon provincial region which at one time covered Yangon. It was on 10th April 1795 which happened to be the first day of Thingyan (Songkran), around 8p.m. at night. Symes gave a vivid description:-

"At a little before eight o' clock, the hour when the play was to commence, we proceeded to the house of the Maywoon, accompanied by Baba- Sheen, who, on all occasions, acted as master of the ceremonies. The theatre was the open court, splendidly illuminated by lamps and torches; the Maywoon and his lady sat in a projecting balcony of his house; we occupied seats below him, raised about two feet from the ground and covered with carpets; a crowd of specators were seated in a circle round the stage. The performance began immediately on our arrival, and far excelled any Indian drama I had ever seen. The dialogue was spirited, without rant, and the action animated, without being extravagant: the dresses of the principal performers were showy and becoming. I was told that the best actors were natives of Siam, a nation which, though unable to contend with the Birmans and Peguers in war, have cultivated with more success the refined arts of peace. By way of an interlude between the acts, a clownish buffon entertained the audience with a recital of different passages, and by grimace, and frequent alterations of tone and countenance, extorted loud peals of laughter from the spectators. The Birmans seem to delight in mimickry, and are very expert in the practice, possessing uncommon versatility of countenance."[1]

Dr. Francis Buchanan who accompanied Symes' 1795 mission to Myanmar has given us some farther particulars on this subject:

"Althought these entertainments, like the Italian opera, consists of music, dancing, action, with a dialogue in recitative, yet we understood, that no part but the songs was previously composed. The subject [of the play] is generally taken from some of the legends of their heroes, especially of Rama;

1. Symes, Michael. *An Account of the Embassy to the Court of Ava. . .* 1800. p. 177-178.

and the several parts, songs and actions, being assigned to different performers, the recitative part or dialogue is left to each actors's ingenuity . If, from the effects on the audience, we might judge of the merit of the performance, it must be very considerable, as some of the performers had the art of keeping the multitude in a roar. I often, however, suspected, that the audience, were not difficult to please; for I frequently observed the Myoowun of Haynthawade [Hamsavati or Hanthawadi] (the man of high rank whom we most frequently saw ,thrown into immoderate laughter by the most childish contrivances.)"

"The Ramahzat (Ramahyana), and other ancient fabulous histories, form the groundwork of nearly all the favourite plays, the outline of the story being merely preserved, while the language of the play depends as much upon the fancy of the performer as the taste of the audience"[1]

Commission for Translating Thai Stories into Myanmar

Although there is still some controversy as to which Myanmar literary version is the earliest and how we obtained the Ramayana literature, there is no doubt that as far as the dramatic performance is concerned Myanmar scholars all agree that the Ramayana dance drama was obtained from Thailand. As concrete proof scholars cite the " Order of the Crown Prince" (Prince Shwedaung), the eldest son of King Bodawpaya (1782-1819 AD). On 3rd of December 1789, the Crown Prince who was not only a very able and courageous General of the Army, but also a lover of music,poetry and drama issued an Order for Myanmar translations to be made of stories and plays brought back from Siam (i.e. Ayutthaya) and Chiang Mai within the previous two decades. A Commission of eight high-ranking royalty, officials, scholars,

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1. *Journal of the Asiatic Soc. of Bengal*, vol 8,p. 535. Reprinted in Mackenzie. Kenneth R. H. *Burmah and the Burmese* 1853. p.93-94.

writers and musicians was appointed to work in consultation with Th interpreters from Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai.[1]

The Crown Prince's Order states:-

" This is a list of persons responsible for selecting from the completed works such plots and scenes as would be suitable for the Palace and Royal Apartments and responsible for writing in full the poems and songs for the plots and scenes so that they could be sung, presented and acted.

Writers of Music and Songs

(1) Pabhavati, the Lady Thakin Minmi (1758-1798) ex-queen of King Singu (1776-1782). At the time she had remarried the Prince, Lord of Kama town. He was a son of King Bodawpaya who had succeeded King Singu. This Lord of Kama wast he 8th member of this Committee.

(2) Lord of Pyinsi town,the Prince Commander of the Royal Cavalry.

(3) U Kyi Soe, Maha Nanda Yodha, Lord of Maletha village and Ngetoe. He was a Privy Councillor.

(4) U Sa (1766-1853), at the time Zeya Thinkhaya, Herald to the Privy Council. He later became Lord of Myawady, a famous soldier, diplomat, musician and poet.

Writers of Dialogues and Poems

(5) Prince Minye Nanda Meit, Lord of Malun town, later Lord of Mekkhara town.

(6) Nemyo Kyaw Swa, Assistant Minister, Lord of Moda town.

(7) U Toe, author of *Rama Yagan*; his title was Nemyo Raza-thu, Herald to the Crown Prince and Treasurer.

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4. Pe Maung Tin, U. " Cultural Activities in Konbaung Period. Pt. one. The Story of How the Ramayana Came to Burma". *The Working People's Daily, Sunday Supplement* (14 Mar 1965). no page no.

(8) Prince Thado Dhama Raza, Lord of Taungoo town. While he was Lord of Kama town he ,married Lady Thakin Minmi. The plays completed with plots and scenes were *I-naung, Rama, Sankhapatta, Kesasiri* -- 4 plays[1].

We, therefore, know that four eminent composers of music and songs headed by the talented Lady Thakin Minmi wrote, or rather adapted the Thai tunes and wrote Myanmar words for the songs to be sung in the Ramayana performance. Also four writers including two Myanmar Princes took part in writing the dialogue and poems for the Myanmar Ramayana Court Drama. They were helped by Thai nobility and artistes who would have explained orally the plot, songs and dialogue as used in the Ayutthaya Ramayana court drama.

In a record of 1863 deposited in the Royal Treasury which also served as a Royal Record Office, there is a note saying that the husband and wife team wrote one play each: i.e the Lord of Taungoo wrote *Sankhapatta* and his wife Lady Thakin Minmi, the *Kesasiri*, both stories being from the *Zinme(Chiang Mai) Pannasa Jataka*. Although there is no record for the Ramayana it is probable that the commission members made a joint effort in translating from Thai to Myanmar. We know for certain that Prince Pyinsi and the young U Sa, (only 23 at the time) wrote some of the songs set to adapted Thai music, as these songs called *Yodaya* (or Ayutthaya = Thai) have come down to us in the *Maha Gita*, collections of Myanmar classical songs and music where their names are appended under the songs they wrote[2]. In this collection there are also some Ramayana songs whose authors are unknown.

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1 Pe Maung Tin, U. " Cultural Activities in Konbaung Period. Pt. one. "The Story of How the Ramayana Came to Burma", *The Working People's Daily, Sunday Supplement* (14 Mar. 1965). no page number.

2 *Maha Gita*. Various editions. See Myanmar. Culture Ministry ed. 3vols. in one. 1997. Section on Yodaya Songs. p. 75-94.

U Thein Han, after careful study of the songs and music in the Myanmar Ramayana, and discussions with some Thai musicians, was of the opinion that these songs although termed "Yodaya" by the Myanmar, are really adapted Thai tunes which he said had been "Burmanized" and not taken directly from Thai[1]

U Myint Kyi, Myanmar scholar and researcher of Myanmar music, wrote that though Thai songs and music of the Ramayana were at first directly translated into Myanmar, "later new lyrics were composed in our own language with melodic adaptations of the original Thai style in the same manner as western pop music has been adapted to our own lyrics now"[2]. In his paper "Three Yodaya Songs Representing Thai Element in Myanmar Classical Music" read at the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies, held in Chiang Mai in 1996, of the three Thai songs studied, two are from the Ramayana.

Sir James George Scott (1851-1935) who was in Lower Myanmar after its annexation by the British described the Myanmar life, customs and beliefs as he observed it in the late 1870's, in his classic work *The Burman, his Life and Notions*, using the pseudonym Shway Yoe. In the chapter on "Plays", he mentions that the Ramazat, i.e. the Ramayana, is a constant, abiding favourite dramatic performance with the Myanmar people. He goes on to describe the Ramayana as it was performed in Yangon by a Royal Palace Theatrical Troupe sent by King Mindon on the occasion of the Proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India in 1876.

"Everything was of the best possible kind; the royal drum and cymbal harmonicons, the trumpets, the flutes, even the bamboo clappers, were of an excellence never before known in Rangoon. The players were famous

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1. Thein Han, U. "Yama Zatkhin Bon hnint Tay Gita," *Sabei Phyu* (Dec. 1986). Reprinted in *Collected Works of Saya Zaw Gyi*. Vol 1. . . 1993. p.171.
2. Myint Kyi, U. "Three Yodaya Songs Representing the Thai Element in Myanmar Classical Music". *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Thai Studies*. Theme VII. 1996. p.161. Reprinted in *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*. no. 5 (June 2000) p. 27-36.

wherever Burmese was spoken, and the play lasted five nights. The general opinion was that it called forth more admiration of King Mindon than loyalty for the Empress [Victoria] among the delta people."[1]

The Stage

The "stage" for the Ramayana dramatic performance was at first only an open court, lighted with lamps and torches as seen by Michael Symes in 1795. Sometimes there was a branch of a tree stuck in the middle of the circular space where the players performed. But it gradually grew more elaborate, probably under the influence of the foreign theatrical troupes which visited Lower Myanmar after Bago (Pegu) and all the coastal areas were annexed by the British in 1853.[2] From the time when Ramayana was first performed, within a period of about 75 years theatres were being built as part of the palace complex, for example when Mandalay Palace was constructed in 1857, there was a temporary Royal Theatre building near the Hman Nan Saung (the Central Palace) where the king spent most of his days. This Theatre Drawing Room or Pwe Viewing Hall was at first a temporary theatre for the royal family, built of bamboo with a cone-shaped roof. Later in the reign of King Thibaw (1878-1885) it was replaced by a permanent structure, a Yun (Lanna) Thai style building with a three-tiered roof.[3]

Also the simple, nearly bare stage setting with only two door-ways down stage for exit or entry of the actors[4] was replaced by an elaborate stage which could portray Ravana abducting Sita and conveying her on an aerial journey by use of ropes and pulleys. The theatre was constructed so that

1. George Scott, Sir. *The Burman, His Life and Notions* , by Shway Yoe . . 3rd ed. 1910. p.295.
2. Thein Han, U. " Yama Zatkhin Bon hint Gita," *Sabei Phyu*, (Dec. 1986). Reprinted in *Collected Works of Sava Zaw Gyi. Vol. I. . .* 1993. p. 170.
3. *Mya Nan San Kyaw, the Royal Palace* [Myanmar. Dept. of Archaeology.] [1995?] p. 36.
4. Thein Han, U and U Khin Zaw "Ramayana in Burmese Literature and Arts." . . . 1976. p.146.

actors could disappear underneath the stage floor or re-appear. A pond with water lilies could be created in the middle of the stage. Even vehicles carrying humans drawn by small elephants and horses could be brought on stage. The settings of this elaborate stage for the Palace Theatre was recorded fully in the Royal Chronicle when two special theatres were built for the Earboring Ceremony of King Thibaw's royal daughter in January 1885.[1]

Dramatic Presentation

In both the live stage and the marionette stage, the Ramayana from early times to the present is presented using four techniques-

(1) Dramatic words and gestures.

(2) Dramatic words interspersed with relevant songs.

(3) Dramatic recitation with a musical background.

(4) Dance and miming to relevant music designated as appropriate to particular dramatic situations[2].

Myanmar Ramayana stage presentation is different from the Thai in that the players lift up their masks to speak, to articulate the dialogue, whereas in Thailand the masks are never lifted and the players never utter any words. In the above four techniques used in Myanamr, for the first three techniques the mask is lifted whenever the players voice the dialogue[3].

Only in the fourth technique the Myanmar Ranayana is exactly the same as the Thai because there is only miming with gestures and dancing to appropriate music. To give an example Hanuman dances and hops about stealthily, while he is searching for Sita in Ravana's stronghold in Sri Lanka;

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1. *Konbaung-zet Maha Yazawindawgyi;* compiled by U Maung Maung Tin (KSM) . . . vol.3. 3rd ed. 1968.p.683-684.
2. Thein Han, U and U Khin Zaw. " Ramayana in Burmese Literaure and Arts," . . . 1978. p. 146-147.
3. *Ibid.* p. 147. See also Hla Thamein. *Myanmar Ramayana* . . .1998. p. 99-100.

the music played is the Yodaya/ Thai *chut*[1], which has become the Myanmar conventional music for stealth.

In the old days the Ramayana took 65 days to present at the Myanmar Royal Court, but later it was shortened to 45 days and to about a month. Unlike some of the Myanmar *Pwes*, theatrical dance and drama presentations, the Ramayana was presented for only three to four hours per night, with only occasional presentations lasting about six hours at a time[2].

Although we can no longer see the full dramatic presentation in modern times we know how it was performed from the manuscript version of *Thiri Rama* (now printed and published under the title *Yama Zat-taw-gyi)* we can read the dialogue, still hear the songs being sung and the music played. We can even visualize how the dramatic presentation looked like, what dresses and masks were worn and so on because there is a well-known continuous series of 347 stone reliefs of Ramayana sculptures at the Maha Loka Marazein Pagoda at Thakhut Ta-nyei about 13 miles north of Budalin and 34 miles east of Monywa in Upper Burma.

The Pagoda was built by the Head of the Buddhist Sasana in Myanmar, the Second Maung-htaung Thathanabaing Sayadaw U Neyya in 1849[3]. From the King to Princes, Princesses, ministers, soldiers, musicians and others, the dresses depicted on the sculptures are all from the early

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1. *Chut* is accepted by the Myanmar as a Thai term, but the present day Thai do not recognise the term or the music.
2. Thein Han, U. " Myanmar Yama Anu-pyinnya hnint Zat Pwe," *Sabei Phyu* (Nov. 1986). Reprinted in *Collected Works of Saya Zaw Gyi* . . 1993. Vol. 1. p. 160-161.
3. Mya Mya Win. *The Maha Loka Marajin Pagoda in Historical Perspective*. Mandalay: University of Mandalay. M.A. thesis in History. 1999. (Unpublished). According to the writer of this thesis the Ramayana stone plaques were donated by King Mindon around 1852-53.

Konbaung Period when the Ramayana dramatic performances were first presented.[1] The dancers are frozen on stone in attractive dance postures.

Colonial Period to the Present

When the last Myanmar king, King Thibaw was sent into exile, the Myanmar Royal Court also ceased to exist. The Ramayana Court Dramatic Troupe which had been set up by the King and the Court was disbanded, some of the dancers and musicians coming down to places like Yangon, Hpapon (Pyapon) Bogale, Hinthada (Henzada)and other cities and towns where they kept alive the Ramayana tradition right up to the present[2].

One Ramayana troupe went to visit and perform before King Thibaw at Ratnagiri in India where the king lived in exile for 31 years.

The British and Myanmar officials continued to patronize the Ramayana Dramatic Troupe asking them to perform for special occasions. For example when the Thai Prince, H.R.H.Prince Damrong Rajanubhab of Thailand visited Myanmar in 1936, he was entertained with a Ramayana performance in Pyay (Prome) by the great Myanmar dancer U Po Sein and his troupe. The Prince wrote that " In the third act Maung Po Sein took the role of Lord Rama in an excerpt from the Ramayana. He carried a bow and was followed by male attendants. Only Maung Po Sein danced, extending his arms with a graceful bearing as he walked, swaying to the rhythm of the orchestra. I perceived that the theatrical style was Thai, because it was slower than and not so sprightly as the Burmese style. The curtain was then drawn forward, ending the portion performed for our benefit"[3]

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1. Than Tun. Dr. "Thakhut Ta-nei Yama." *Hanthawaddy newspaper supplement* (3 Sept.1972). See also U Thein Han and U Khin Zaw. "Ramayana in Burmese Literature and Arts" . . . 1976. p.165.
2. Thein Han. U and U Khin Zaw. " Ramayana in Burmese Literature and Arts" . .1972. p. 166-167. See also U Thein Han. " Yamazat Khin Pon hnei Tay Gita" . . . 1993. p. 171-173.
3. Damrong Rajanubhab. Prince. *Journey Through Burma in 1936. . .* Bangkok: River Books. 1991. p. 206.

Ramayana Drama in Myanmar

After Myanmar regained her Independance in 1948 the Ramayana dramatic performances were actively encouraged by the Ministry of Culture and the State Fine Arts and Drama Schools and from the last six years the new University of Culture kept alive the Ramayana.The State Culture Dance Troupes also performed the Ramayana as a Dance Drama without any dialogue or songs but only with music and dancing.

During 1998, there was much renewed interest in the Ramayana in Myanmar as it was announced in 1997 that for the first time the Ramayana dance troupes will be allowed to compete for a special prize at the Annual Music, Song, Dance and Composing Competitions held by the Ministry of Culture. Secretary (1) of the State Peace and Development Council in his speech on 18th Oct. 1997 pointed out that the Ramayana Dance Performance is an important part of Myanmar culture, and that although we received the Rama story, music, drama and dance elements over many centuries from several neighbouring countries, it has been successfully adapted to conform with our own music, dance and drama traditions to become an integral part of our cultural heritage.[1]

In Yangon there are at present (4) Ramayana Dance Troupes, apart from the State Cultural Dance Troup. They have formed Ramayana Clubs or Societies. Their names are:

(1) *Obo Nan - dwin Yama Athin* headed by U Ohn Maung a well-known Rama dancer who is also a publisher and bookseller of repute.

(2) *Thahaya-dana Yodaya Yama Athin*, the Thai Rama Club, headed by U Bo Ni who made a name in the role of the Golden Deer.

(3) *Myanmar Kyet-thayai Saung Nan-dwin Yama Athin*, the *Court Ramayana* headed by U Hla Moe who had trained in Soviet Union at

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1. Khin Nyunt. Lt.Gen. Speech at National Theatre on 18.10. 97. See *New Light of Myanmar* (19.10.97) Also reported in Hla Thamein.. *Myanmar Ramayana*. . . 1998. p.8-10.(now Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt) Ramayana dance and drama troupes from all over Myanmar competed also in 1999 and 2002.

one time. (4) *Thiri Yama Aphwai* (Annawa) headed by U Than Aung of the Annawa Dhammayone in Bahan quarter.[1]

The Thai Connection Re-examined

Myanmar scholars, musicians and even performers of the Ramayana in Myanmar all say that the dramatic presentation is derived from the Thai Ramayana Court Drama of the late Ayutthaya period. Scholars like U Thein Han, music experts like U Myint Kyi have examined how close the Myanmar Ramayana is to the Thai Ramayana in plot, characters, dialogue, music, songs and so on. The main story is generally the same as both versions are derived from the same source, the great Indian epic, but in details there are many dissimilarities and variations.

Unfortunately, there is no Thai literary version from the Ayutthaya Period which we can use for comparison with the early Myanmar versions of the Ramayana. The *Ramakien*, a work written by King Rama I of the Chakri Dynasty in 1798 was probably based on an older work of the Ayutthaya Period "but lost perhaps in the holocaust of 1767".[2] King Rama I liked the Rama story so much that he not only took the name of the hero of Ramayana, as a title of greatness, but also wrote what is now the earliest standard Thai Ramayana literary version.

U Thein Han compared the *Thiri Rama* (published as *Yama Pya-zat-taw-gyi)* with the *Ramakien* and found that there are many differences in plot, characterization and in details of the Rama story.[3]

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1. Hla Moe, U. (Yama Zat Thabin Pyinnya Shin). "Myanma Yoe-ya Yin Kyeihmu Htain Thein Ye" [To keep alive the Myanmar Cultural Heritage], *Kyei Mon* daily newspaper (18th Apr. 1998) p.5.
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Prof. Ohno Toru of Osaka University of Foreign Studies in Japan, has now carried out detailed comparisons between the *Rama Wuthtu*, which is supposed to be written in Myanmar at a time contemporary with the late Ayutthaya Period, to the *Ramakien* which is probably based on a Ramayana version of the same period. Prof. Ono has noted down in some detail the divergent episodes in the plot, characterization and so on.[1]

Conclusion

By studying the Ramayana in Myanmar we can conclude that the Rama story received from very early times through oral narration was written down in poetry and prose from the 17th century, and that the dramatic performance of the Ramayana first started in the late 18th century had a strong influence from Thai in costumes and masks, plot and characterization, dance gestures and music, but that the Myanmar people adapted it to fit in with their own tradition and culture as they had already received the Ramayana from India, Assam, Manipur and Laos from earlier times

Further research is needed. At present none of the Myanmar versions are available in translations. In concluding my paper I would like to propose that the *Rama Wuthtu*[2] from the 17th century should be translated into English and Thai as this will facilitate further research by international scholars.

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1. Ohno Toru. "Was Myanma Ramayana Translated from Thai Ramayana?" in *Studies in Myanma History* . . .1999. p. 121-142. See also Ohno Toru's " Salient Features of Yama Pya-zat-taw-gyi". *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*. no.11 (June 2003) p.109-118.
2. Now translated into English by Prof. Ohno Toru in *A Study of the Burmese Rama Story*, with an English Translation . . . 1999.

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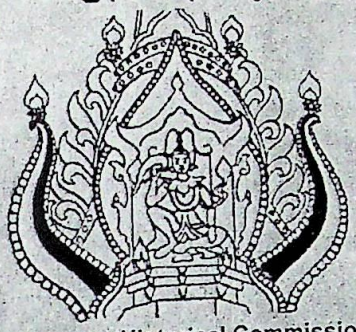

Myanmar Historical Commission

SELECTED WRITINGS OF U THAW KAUNG

Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission

Myanmar Historical Commission
Yangon

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Gallery Notes

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

Legacy in Lacquer: A Living Tradition from Burma
August 24 – October 2, 2010, North Gallery

The art of Burmese lacquer originated in China, where for more than 3000 years, black and red colors were used exclusively. According to the Chinese chronicles, lacquer existed as an artistic medium in central Burma at least since the mid-first millennium C.E.

Originated from the sap of the tree *Melanorrhoea usitat,* it was applied originally as a natural varnish and waterproof coating for vessels, thence in architectural embellishment and later for palace decoration and sculpture, lacquerware's artistic range expanded considerably in the eighteenth century with the adoption of green, yellow, and orange base colors.

Intermittent warfare against Burma's eastern neighbors —especially the former kingdom of Lanna (now in northern Thailand) and Siam (Thailand)—from the fifteenth century C.E. through the close of the pre-colonial period, had the positive effect of bringing Burmese artists into contact with higher levels of craftmenship, new lacquer techniques, as well as an expanded color palette. This was particularly the case with the *Yun* community—the Lao Shan Tribes living around Chiang Mai—whose finest artists were brought to the Court of Ava, where they introduced several new techniques: engraved *Yun* lacquerware entailing the incision of the surface layer; the *Shwei Zawa* technique of applying gold leaf to glossy black surfaces; *Thayo* relief moulded lacquer; and *Hman-zi Shwei cha* incorporating mosaic glass inlay.

An art form highly patronized by successive courts, fine lacquerware was presented by the Burmese kings to diplomatic missions from adjacent countries, and comprised also a key element of the obligatory tribute to the Chinese emperor. Later, lacquer pieces were gifted to European embassies, and served also as tokens of appreciation to Burmese officials.

With the successive annexations by the British during the nineteenth century eventually encompassing the whole of Burma—and the enlarging presence of foreign travelers, tourists, traders and diplomats—the lacquer industry after a period of decline, underwent a marked revival to satisfy this new clientele with new styles and forms, even while the domestic demand remained strong for traditional forms of lacquerware for secular and religious usage.

This exhibition explores the widest aspects of the long and unique Burmese lacquerware tradition: an art form still living, vibrant, and evolving. Objects are displayed here which were produced under the patronage of the Burmese courts, along with later exemplary pieces from the period of renewal during the British era, in response to new markets and new clienteles, continuing through modern (*i.e.*, from the end of the nineteenth century until today) times. Our analysis is presented in four sections:

- The art of giving and receiving within Burmese traditional society —comprised of examples of traditional serving trays, betel and snack boxes for secular uses; and also cases and covers for religious manuscripts.

- Ceremonial and courtly traditions from the nineteenth century;

- *Shwei zawa,* or the gold and gloss black lacquerware tradition.
- Innovation and tradition in accommodating a dynamic and increasingly-sophisticated tourist trade.

The interpretive materials here are drawn largely from two major research initiatives on Burmese lacquer: the seminal work of Sylvia Fraser-Lu, *Burmese Lacquerware* (1985, revised and enlarged in 2000); and the catalogue of the British Museum 2000 exhibition, *Visions from the Golden Land. Burma and the Art of Lacquer,* by Ralph Isaacs and T. Richard Blurton.

For more on Burmese techniques see the video prepared by Rebecca Weinstock and more specifically in the application of gold leaf, *shwei bya*, see the three display cases on the fourth floor of the NIU Founders Memorial Library.

This exhibition was mounted with the collaboration of Rebecca Weinstock and Rachel Walters, NIU graduate students in Art History and Museum Studies.

For a fuller view of the Burma Art Collection's contents, we encourage you to surf through the Center for Burma Studies website:

http://www.niu.edu/burma/collections/index.shtml

Suggested Readings:

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The Journal of Burma Studies

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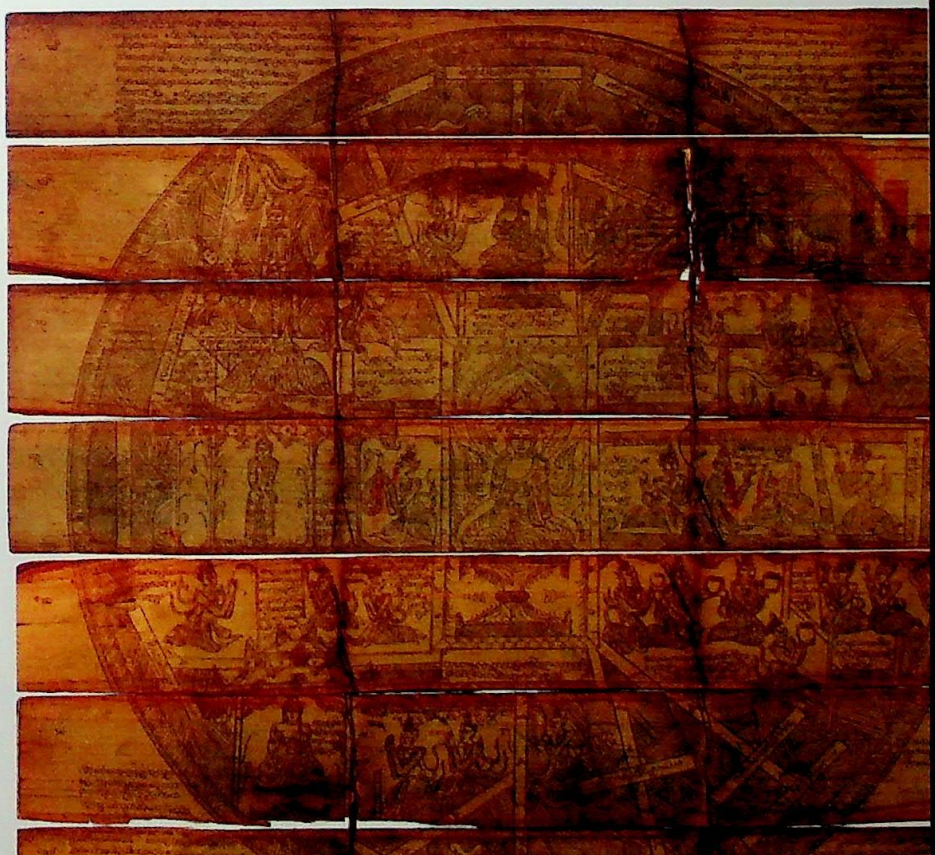

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The Journal of Burma Studies, a refereed journal, is taking a renewed direction to respond to the wealth of new scholarship in the field. We introduce a new format this year including an expanded section of refereed *Articles*, *Research Notes* that report on broader themes and works in progress and *Scholarly Curiosities*, short descriptions of objects from various disciplines. We welcome submissions for all three sections.

With the 2011 volume the *Journal* will be expanding to two issues per year to respond to the scholarly output and to offer more timely access to the new research. We are particularly pleased to be able to highlight the work of new and emerging scholars and to further foster dialogue on Burma Studies internationally. We will also assemble an international editorial board to expand our visibility and connections with scholars across continents and disciplines.

Please join us in this new endeavor by subscribing to the *Journal* and encourage your university's library to subscribe.

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The Journal of Burma Studies
Volume 14
2010

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Death and Disease in the Prisons of Colonial Burma

Penny Edwards
Bitter Pills: Colonialism, Medicine and Nationalism in Burma, 1870-1940

Chie Ikeya
The Scientific and Hygienic Housewife-and-Mother: Education, Consumption and the Discourse of Domesticity

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Healing, Rebellion, and the Law: Ethnologies of Medicine in Colonial Burma, 1928-1932

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The Alchemist and His Ball

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Legacy in Lacquer:

A Living Art from Burma

NIU Art Museum

116 Altgeld Hall
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
Phone 815.753.1936

www.niu.edu/artmuseum
hours: T – F 10 am – 5 pm Sat 12 – 4
and by appointment for group tours

Legacy in Lacquer:
A Living Art from Burma

August 24 – October 2, 2010

Based on examples from the Burma Art Collection at NIU originating from the renaissance of lacquerware during the British colonial period to the present, this exhibition explores the techniques and designs of a vital living art.

Curated by: Catherine Raymond, NIU Professor of Art History and Director of the Center for Burma Studies

Museum Fall Opening Reception: Thursday, September 9, 4:30-7
Legacy in Lacquer Mini Reception: Thursday, September 16, 5-6

Curator's Talks:
Thursday, September 16, 6 pm Altgeld 315, "Overview of the Exhibition"
Saturday, September 18, 2 pm Altgeld 315, "Narratives in Burmese Lacquer"

Front Image:

BC.87.01.43.00 Ceremonial betel-box with inlay. Bamboo, lacquer, colored glass, gold leaf. Burma/Myanmar, 19th century, 67 cm. h. x 67 cm. d. Gift of Sarah Bekker.

Sponsored in part by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, the Friends of the NIU Art Museum, and the Arts Fund 21.

CENTER FOR BURMA STUDIES

Northern Illinois University

To view more of the Burma Collections, visit www.g

CENTER FOR BURMA STUDIES

In 1986, Northern Illinois University was selected by the Burma Studies Group of the Association for Asian Studies to be the national Center for Burma Studies. At that time, the Burma Studies Foundation was created, which, as part of its mission, supports the Center for Burma Studies. It does this through the gathering of Burmese materials, which are suitable for inclusion in the Burma Collections at Northern Illinois University. This interrelationship was developed to focus the scarce resources on Burmese cultures in an environment where they would receive appropriate care and could be readily utilized by those interested in the country of Burma/Myanmar and its development.

THE BURMA COLLECTIONS

The NIU Burma Collections have more than quadrupled since their inception. Amongst more than 11,000 items relating to Burma, extensive bibliographic holdings are conserved in the Donn V. Hart Southeast Asia Collections of Founders Memorial Library (FML) and are available free of charge through interlibrary loan. Rare books, maps and manuscripts related to Burmese cultures may be viewed in the Rare Books and Special Collections department at Founders Memorial Library. Following the generous donation from Konrad and Sarah Bekker in 1986, which formed the core of our collection, the center has welcomed multiple collections from various donors which are displayed on a continuous basis throughout various campus locations.

GOALS

The Center for Burma Studies is a nonpolitical, nondegree granting, administrative and academic unit within Northern Illinois University. The center has the following goals:

- The maintenance and expansion of a comprehensive research library to sustain the field of Burma Studies
- The collection, care, and exhibition of the arts of Burma
- The support and promotion of undergraduate and graduate teaching concerning Burma/Myanmar
- The organization and hosting of self-supporting national and international conferences on Burma Studies
- The securing of educational opportunities through scholarships, internships, and fellowships
- The care and enhancement of archival resources such as photographs, oral histories, personal papers, and field notes
- The promotion of outreach activities to schools and communities
- Encouraging the performance of Burmese arts
- The publication of relevant scholarship on Burma: including the referred annual publication—*The Journal for Burma Studies*—and the *Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group*

To view more of the **Burma Collections**, visit www.grad.niu.edu/burma/webpgs/collections.html.

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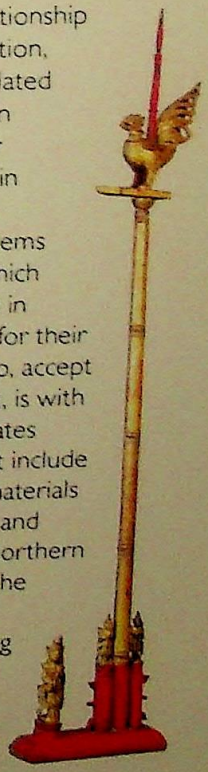
ADMINISTRATION

The center is administered by Director Catherine Raymond, who is an art historian specializing in the art of Burma and a faculty member in the School of Art. As director, she serves as a nonvoting, ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees of the Burma Studies Foundation.

BURMA STUDIES FOUNDATION

The center enjoys a unique relationship with the Burma Studies Foundation, which assures that all Burma-related items donated to the foundation will be offered to the center for inclusion and conservation within the university's collections. The center accepts Burma-related items only through the foundation, which retains remainderman's interest in these collections, thus allowing for their continuing oversight. Ownership, accept for this remainderman's interest, is with the university. The center operates under important conditions that include public display of art, access to materials and records, and administrative and also financial guarantees from Northern Illinois University. Oversight by the foundation combines strong support of the center with lasting responsibility to the field of Burma studies.



DONATIONS: GIFTS, BEQUESTS, LEGACIES, AND TRANSFERS

The center welcomes the friends of Burma to donate materials and funds for the continuing support and expansion of its programs and collections. Donations for the center are passed through the foundation, and are deductible for tax purposes to the full extent allowed by law. A copy of the IRS determination letter will be sent to potential donors on request. The foundation advises donors to have objects such as art and books appraised before donation, as neither the foundation nor the center may legally function in this capacity.

INQUIRIES

Inquiries should be directed to:
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Center for Burma Studies
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115-2828
Phone: (815) 753-0512
FAX: (815) 753-1776
E-mail: craymond@niu.edu
www.grad.niu.edu/burma

Address of the Burma Studies Foundation:
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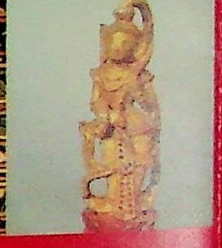
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